

[SOCIALISM AND CITY PLANNING: THE WORK OF CHARLES WHITNALL
IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN]

A Thesis

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by

Katherine Nicole Kaliszewski

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ABSTRACT

[This thesis examines the life of Charles B. Whitnall an important and influential member of Milwaukee's Socialist Party and a founding member on the both the city and county's planning boards in the early twentieth century, whose work has seldom been studied in its entirety. This paper shows how Whitnall used both his central position in the successful Socialist Party and his earlier life's lessons as a florist to advocate for early decentralization of the city and county of Milwaukee.]

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherine Kaliszewski was born and practically raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She attended the University of Wisconsin–Madison for her undergraduate career where she majored in History, Art History and Classical Humanities. Her love of her hometown, and her admiration of Daniel Hoan led her to the research Charles B. Whitnall. She took too long writing this thesis.

“The gods must have been in a very happy mood when they decided to create that splendid gem of natural beauty that is today known as Milwaukee” C.B. Whitnall

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There have been many people in my life that have made this thesis possible. Some have no idea how much so. I guess my thanks starts with a little village, my high school rival - Greendale, Wisconsin. That started a spark which led from Garden Homes to Daniel Hoan to Charles B. Whitnall. And I can't forget a random conversation with a Milwaukee historian who pushed me in this direction.

I also have to thank the diligent staff at the several research arenas that I sat for hours at a time at: the Milwaukee County Historical Society, the City of Milwaukee's Legislative Reference Bureau, and the multiple people I talked to at the Milwaukee Public Library. Too all at the Wisconsin Historical Society – you have helped me more than just this thesis. And of course, to those students and librarians who digitized the multiple archives I poured through.

To my multitude of friends and acquaintances who listened to me cry over the evolution of this monster. To Blue. To my Death Star. You are appreciated more than I am able to say.

I want and need to thank my mother and father for just about everything. I can't say I would have even finished this had it not been for their strength, their love, and their constant badgering.

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INTRODUCTION

Much of the city and county of Milwaukee has been shaped by the work of one man's vision: Charles B. Whitnall. Born just a decade after Wisconsin became a state, he watched the small city of Milwaukee grow from an agricultural center point in the Midwest to a large, industrial city. Throughout his life, he dabbled in many different professions including a florist, a politician, a banker, and a city planner, yet it was his first connection with nature that would prove to be the main motivation behind much of his work. Whitnall is often mentioned passed off in the history books as the "father of the county parks." Yet, he did so much more. He ran a successful florist business, first with his father, and then on his own. He was a founding member of the Socialist Party in Milwaukee. And it was his views of the importance of planning that would guide two of Milwaukee's mayors.

Whitnall was born on the edge of America's Industrial Revolution in a city that would embody the age. Originally raised on a twenty acre plot of land that included large greenhouses, he watched as Milwaukee developed from a frontier town to a bustling, and congested, metropolis large enough to annex his homestead. Born amid flowers and nature, his development and the rapid change of the city obviously affected the way he saw the world. This, combined with the rise in city planning would act as a guide for much of his later life.

Although Milwaukee's Socialist Party did not necessary affect his beliefs, Whitnall was also at the center of one of the most powerful and

successful organizations. It was his ties to this Party that led to his election as City Treasurer and a lifeline of allies that would support his views. In an article written for *Utopian Societies*, Roger Paden points out that “the idea of Marxist urban planning seems to be something of an oxymoron as there seems to be an essential conflict between Marxist theory and the necessarily normative stance that must inform the practice of urban planning.”¹ Whitnall made few claims to Socialism as a guiding force for his planning ideas. If anything, his ideas within planning the city for the working-class influenced his Socialism.

Between Whitnall, Mayor Emi Seidel, and Mayor Daniel Hoan, planning was frequently a part of campaigning and later government initiatives, touted as the cure for all the city’s urban problems. Planning was not part of the larger national Socialist movement that was more focused on laborer’s rights, but in Milwaukee, it was a vital pillar of municipal improvement. Milwaukee’s Socialism has been maligned or ignored over years, partially because, while its leaders were zealots in the movement, they acted moderately within their different elected positions.

American Socialism can be considered part of a larger movement that swept across the country in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Progressivism, which looked to reform the urban ills such as labor problems, prohibition, public health, and good housing for the poor.² And the

¹Roger Paden, “Marxism, Utopianism, and Modern Urban Planning” *Utopian Studies* Volume 14 Number 1(2003): 82.

²² Roy Lubove “The Urban Community: Housing and Planning in the Progressive Era,” (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 1.

idea of scientifically planning a city instead of allowing it to grow unchecked came out of this time also. American Socialism at this time was far more focused on the dismantling of capitalism and workers' right, than to advocate towards better city planning. And Progressivism had a following in Wisconsin, as they elected Robert 'Fighting Bob' La Follette as governor of Wisconsin from 1901 to 1906 and senator from 1906 to 1925.³ Therefore, while a Socialist in name, Whitnall proscribed to Progressive planning ideas. And Whitnall would use his twin positions of influence in Milwaukee's planning – on both a city and county board – to change the direction of Milwaukee's lay out for 'the better.'

To this date no one has attempted to chronicle his life and his work in one document. That is not to say that no one has ever researched Charles Whitnall. He was a significant person in Milwaukee history; he has streets and a large park named after him; his childhood home is a designated landmark. Often times, however, he is dismissed in several sentences or paragraphs. He stood behind the mayors of Milwaukee and defined their planning policies for decades, which ultimately changed the layout of the city and county of Milwaukee. This is an attempt to address both the influencing factors of his life and his work in one large and encompassing document.

Although Whitnall was a large part of the Milwaukee Socialist movement, very little has been written about him, except for short journal articles and other bits and pieces within larger works like those of John Gurda

³ "La Follette, Robert Marion Sr. 1855 – 1925," from wisconsinhistory.org accessed 31 October 2012

and John McCarthy. That is not surprising, while his son donated Whitnall's papers to the Milwaukee County Historical Society, he wrote no autobiography like Mayor Seidel. Whitnall's papers are not nearly as extensive as Daniel Hoan's, who was also alive when his biography was written. Much of his collection at the County Historical Society contained professional papers, with few manuscripts or letters. In many of the County Park's papers, Whitnall was given much praise by others, but there was little evidence of his own work saved and archived. Daniel Hoan's collection, both at the County Historical Society and at the Milwaukee Public Library were more helpful. The Public Library also held a large collection of Whitnall's published writings.

The greatest asset to researching Whitnall's planning policies was Milwaukee's Legislative Reference Bureau. Whitnall worked for the city for almost forty consecutive years, and while some material has been lost, much of his work with the Board of Public Land Commissioners was recorded in the Common Council Proceedings and contained in their archives. This is the first time the Board of Public Land Commissioners has been studied. Before this several dates had been suggested for its beginning, when Whitnall joined, and when he was voted president.

Much of the information Whitnall's personal life was found in newspaper articles and journals of the day. Looking through these easily and quickly would not have been possible without the use of the internet archives. Many of which had not yet been scanned until the last few years. The Milwaukee Public Library microfiche collection and the *Milwaukee Journal*

Sentinel's online newspaper were easily perused and, since Whitnall was a mover and shaker of his day, much of his personal life that had remained hidden, became evident. Also, archive.org had both the *Proceedings for the Annual Conference for the Society of American Florists* and their weekly journal the *American Florist*, which was necessary for the understanding of Whitnall's flower shop, and his slow move away from the business.

In order to understand fully Whitnall's motivation, one needed to start at the beginning of Milwaukee's growth. Charles Whitnall was part of a much broader movement, both within Wisconsin and the rest of the country. Many of his views were by no means original, yet his grew out of the congestion and dirt he saw in downtown Milwaukee. Chapter One outlines the growth of both the city of Milwaukee in terms of population and industry and it also follows the birth and ultimate first victory of the Socialist Party with Whitnall's first win included.

Chapter Two is a short biography of Whitnall's life and career which has not been done before. It starts with his father's immigration to Milwaukee and the building of the Whitnall Knoll; both Frank Whitnall and the family homestead were incredibly important to Whitnall personally and professionally. He spent his entire life living on the Whitnall Knoll. His first wife was his neighbor, and this was where the Whitnall Floral Business was located. It was at the Knoll that Whitnall first learned about nature and how important it was to his growth and development. This would ultimately affect his planning ideas for the rest of the city and county. One also finds that

Whitnall was not just a florist and a planner, but a banker and an inventor and was one of the first to think of and market a telegraph delivery service. He also was the City Treasurer for two years and after that he opened the first cooperative bank in Milwaukee, which was a successful venture until his death in 1949.

The third chapter follows Whitnall's career in parks and planning in the city and county of Milwaukee. Whitnall had started speaking about planning and parks years before he officially joined any planning bodies. The early ideas he held rarely changed, but they did evolve to include the incorporation of the automobile as another factor in the decentralization of the city. He worked tirelessly for years and helped found two planning boards, both of which still are in place today. His work inspired countless others in Milwaukee and across the country and his son Gordon Whitnall became an important planner in Los Angeles and credited his father with that entirely.

Whitnall was not always successful, as it is with most planners. Yet his quiet force of character and his twin positions on a city and county board influenced many in positions in power. This seemingly quiet perseverance was praised by all late in his life.⁴ Others within the Socialist Party and the multiple planning boards he sat on credited his thinking to changing Milwaukee and their views.

⁴ Milwaukee Public Library, Charles B. Whitnall News Clipping, "Women Honor C.B. Whitnall – Pioneer of Park System, moved by Tribute, gives credit to others" Uncredited Newspaper, Circa December 1940.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Beginnings of Socialism: Milwaukee 1848 - 1912

It was the Milwaukee journalist and historian, John Gurda who pointed out in his distinguished history, *The Making of Milwaukee*, that if any city in the United States were to give Socialism a “fair trial” it would be the Cream City.⁵ Milwaukee was the first major city to elect not just one, but three socialists to be Mayor.

Milwaukee’s dalliance in Socialism began early in its establishment. Its seeds were introduced by the German immigrants of the 1840s. These pioneers went on to import many of their traditions such as the Turner Societies and *Bier Gartens* (beer gardens) into the fabric of Milwaukee’s culture. These provided gathering places for new political ideas to be disseminated throughout the large population of the city.

Though German immigrants were a major portion of Milwaukee’s growing population, throughout the later 1800s the city grew further both in terms of persons and industry. The city became industrialized after the Civil War and the new work opportunities brought more immigrants into the city. This fast industrialization often led to dangerous workplaces and long workdays, which also caused friction within the city. Tempers boiled over into violence in 1886, which led to the death of five strikers and the establishment of a new party for worker’s rights. That party fizzled quickly and the workers of

⁵ John Gurda, *The Making Milwaukee* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 202.

Milwaukee were still left wanting for representation again. In addition to the poor working conditions, corrupt officials also appear to have accelerated the development of Milwaukee's Socialist party. The city had seen crooked officials before, but the tipping point for the party appears to be Mayor David Rose, who held the position for almost a decade and was constantly defending his office from calls of mismanagement. His poor leadership allowed the Socialist Party and Emily Seidel to sweep through city politics. While Emil Seidel only sat in power for two years, his short tenure also brought to power Daniel Hoan and Charles Whitnall, who would later work together to change Milwaukee for the better.

As the country began to open itself to a rush of new immigrants, Milwaukee had just come together from three opposing townships: Walker's Point, Kilbourn Town, and Juneau Town in 1847.⁶ Seventy-nine percent of immigrants coming to the United States during the 1840s were of either Irish or German descent. While the Irish tended to stay on the East Coast because many were too poor to move inwards, Germans were likely to be better off and were able to move inwards to the outer frontiers of the country where there was cheap farmland.⁷ Many headed to Wisconsin. By the end of the decade, Milwaukee's population had grown from a sparse 1,712 to 20,061.⁸ And by

⁶ Originally collected and published by Dr. Louis F. Frank, Translated from the German by Margaret Wolff, Edited with introduction and notes by Harry H. Anderson, *German-American Pioneers in Wisconsin & Michigan: The Frank-Kerler letters 1849-1864* (Oconomowoc, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1989), xii.

⁷ Gurda, 61.

⁸ Roger D. Simon, "The City Building Process: Housing and Service in New Milwaukee Neighborhoods 1880-1910," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Volume 68, No. 5 (1978). 14

1850 one-quarter of those citizens were German-born.⁹ A small, but prominent group of these German immigrants have come to be called the *Acht und viersiger*, or the Forty-Eighters.

Historian G.M. Trevelyan called the year 1848 “. . . the turning point at which modern history failed to turn.”¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, German states first weathered the assault of Napoleon’s conquering armies and then weak monarchical leadership, all of which lead to a protest and an eventual revolution against the Metternich system.¹¹ The revolution collapsed and lead to an exodus of the country’s free-thinkers and radical leaders.¹² It would be presumptuous to claim that the majority of the German immigrants were the leaders of this fighting, most were actually farmers and artisans fleeing the violence or looking for new economic opportunity in United States.¹³ Yet, a large number of the intellectuals behind the revolution did eventually come to America, and these became known as the *Forty-Eighters*. They established themselves in many large cities throughout the United States – particularly Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and St. Louis.¹⁴ One such *Forty-Eighter*, Carl Schurz, came to Wisconsin in 1854 and settled near to Milwaukee in Watertown. His wife, Margrethe, would go on to found the first kindergarten in the country.¹⁵

⁹ Anderson, xi.

¹⁰ Carl Wittke, “The German Forty-Eighters in America: A Centennial Appraisal,” *The American Historical Review*, Volume 53, No. 4 (July, 1948), 711.

¹¹ Wittke, 711.

¹² Wittke, 712.

¹³ Wittke, 712.

¹⁴ Robert Wild, “Chapters in the History of the Turners,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Volume 9, No. 2. (December 1925), 127.

¹⁵ <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/odd/archives/001103.asp>, accessed 9/9/11.

German immigrants carved out an area on Milwaukee's west side and then established key cultural practices within the city.¹⁶ Clustered together, they created beer gardens, social centers, pageants, performing arts centers, and schools, all with a distinct Teutonic flavor.¹⁷ Because of their large, energetic activities Milwaukee came to be known, on both sides of the Atlantic, as the *Deutch-Athens* of the United States.¹⁸

One such practice, the *Turnvereine*, was established in 1853 with the help of a Forty-Eighter, August Willich.¹⁹ Willich had been a part of the League of Communists who had commissioned Karl Marx to write his *Communist Manifesto* and had been a leader during the Revolution in Baden in South Germany.²⁰ Willich had been one of the founders in Cincinnati's Turner Society and, while visiting Milwaukee in 1853, had persuaded some young men to come together to organize another "Social Turnverein."²¹ The club was officially chartered on June 27, 1853, when a small number of German men enrolled.²²

The Turners originally were a gymnastic society founded in 1811 by Frederick Ludwig Jahn.²³ Father Jahn, as he became known, started the society to prepare German children for resistance to Napoleonic force.²⁴ The Turnverein in Germany is believed to have been a springboard for the ideals of

¹⁶ Simon, "The City Building Process," 32.

¹⁷ Edward A. Benoit, "A Democracy of Its Own: Milwaukee's Socialism, Difference, and Pragmatism" (M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2009), 2.

¹⁸ Benoit, 2.

¹⁹ Wild, 127.

²⁰ Benoit, 2.

²¹ Wild, 127.

²² Wild, 127.

²³ <http://www.milwaukeeeturners.org/about/history-of-milwaukee-turners>, accessed 10/4/11.

²⁴ <http://www.milwaukeeeturners.org/about/history-of-milwaukee-turners>, accessed 10/4/11.

the 1848 Revolutions.²⁵ The society adopted the motto: “A sound mind in a sound body,” which meant that along with their athletic pursuits of sharpshooting and gymnastics, they often held lively intellectual lectures and debates.²⁶ Turner Societies tended to be liberal leaning, against slavery; a natural home to socialist thought. The Turnverein in Milwaukee went on to be an important establishment in the political history of the city. Turner Hall, built in 1882, was the staging area for the 1886 riots, and a location for many later Socialist meetings. Many of Milwaukee’s mayors, including all three socialist mayors of Milwaukee, and the present mayor²⁷, belonged to the organization.²⁸

Yet, while the seeds of an American Socialist Party were first observed within the context of the German enclave, it was the city’s industrial and political history of the 1870s through to the 1900s that made their beliefs palatable to the rest of Milwaukee’s citizens. Spurred on by the westward expansion of the railroads and improvements to Lake Michigan’s harbor, commercial activities like flour milling, packing, tanning and brewing advanced along with heavy industrial ventures in steel and iron work.²⁹ With the extension of heavy industry within the area, the population began to swell

²⁵ Wild, 125.

²⁶ The first Turner Society in the United States, established in Cincinnati, was started by two heroes of the Revolution: Willich and Friedrich Hecker.

²⁷ Present Mayor is Michal Barrett.

²⁸ <http://www.milwaukeeeturners.org/about/history-of-milwaukee-turners>, accessed 10/4/11.

²⁹ Simon, “The City Building Process,” 15-18

again. In 1870, Milwaukee had a population of 71,234; by 1880 it had almost doubled to 124,000.³⁰

The Civil War had been the major influence that launched Milwaukee's factories. The minor railway established within the city before the war was expanded westward in 1865 and 1866. Then, in 1866, the Milwaukee Iron Company, the Midwest's first heavy industry was chartered.³¹ Built in the then suburb of Bay View, the area was close to a high grade of ore in Dodge County. It was at this point Milwaukee's earlier trade and agricultural based economy shifted to manufacturing.³² The smaller forms of manufacturing in the city of Milwaukee, like woodworking craft shops, began to mechanize.³³ Emil Seidel, the first Socialist mayor of Milwaukee had worked in one such woodworking shop.³⁴

In late 1869 improvements were made to the Menomonee River Valley, an area at the center of the city.³⁵ To local American Indians, the Potawatomi, the Valley had originally been their hunting and fishing grounds, but by the 1870s it was the heart of heavy industry. By 1870, canals had been built and 13,700 linear feet of dockage had been added to the Valley.³⁶ The meat processing industry moved into the area including slaughtering, meat packing, and tanning. By 1872, Milwaukee had the largest tannery in the world, owing

³⁰ John. M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning, and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960*. (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 5.

³¹ Gurda, 105-108

³² Gurda, 147

³³ Roger D. Simon, "Foundation for Industrialization, 1835-1880," in *Milwaukee Stories*, ed. Thomas J. Jablonsky, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2005), 308.

³⁴ Gurda, 210.

³⁵ Simon, "The City Building Process," 19-20.

³⁶ Simon, "The City Building Process," 19-20.

in part to the state's hemlock supply.³⁷ By the early 1880s, an increasing portion of the city's factories were located in the Valley, including lumberyards, brickyards, and coal yards.³⁸

Spurred on by the growth of factories and jobs, Milwaukee's population grew exponentially throughout the 1880s. It became known as the city with the largest foreign-born population. Alongside the Germans, the Irish and the Polish settled into other neighborhoods. The Poles would go on to become the second largest ethnic enclave in the city, though still far behind the Germans.³⁹

By 1880 industrial workers made up over 40 percent of the local labor force.⁴⁰ The Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce Milwaukee indicated that, as the fifth largest city in the United States,

Our manufacturing interests are in a prosperous condition. Every establishment in the city, great and small – and flour mills alone excepted – was constantly kept busy, and in the manufacture of iron and other stable commodities it was found impossible to fully supply the demand. The activity in our local industries of every kind is exemplified in the consumption of coal which was unprecedented.⁴¹

Yet, with all of this change in the workplace, there was little time for regulation or improvement in the working conditions in factories. Most factory workers were working ten hour days, six days a week, with pay for little more than \$1.25 a day. As elsewhere in the country, conditions were just as dangerous for workers' health.⁴²

³⁷ Simon, "Foundations for Industrialization," 310.

³⁸ Simon, "Foundations for Industrialization," 317.

³⁹ Simon, "The City Building Process," 34.

⁴⁰ Gurda, 128.

⁴¹ Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report, 1879*, (Milwaukee 1880), 47-48.

⁴² Gurda, 147

Milwaukee's blue collar workers began their fight for fair labor laws early. According to labor historian Thomas Gavett, there had been sixteen active unions by 1867, though these were for *skilled* German workers.⁴³ Labor union activity fluctuated during the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s because of the unstable United States economy, which oscillated between extreme booms and recessions.⁴⁴ Labor at this time was often not a cohesive force, but rather divided by jobs and nationalities. Yet most workers agreed on working towards an eight-hour work day.⁴⁵ Milwaukee and Chicago became important centers for union activity. Robert Schilling of the Knights of Labor was sent to Milwaukee and worked towards creating safer working conditions.⁴⁶

Strikes were a common union tactic during the 1870s and the 1880s. In May 1886, though, tempers became heated. Just a day after Chicago's deadly labor riot in Haymarket Square, Milwaukee's much smaller march also turned deadly. It had begun with a labor parade which had been planned by the Central Labor Union and in cooperation with the Eight-Hour League.⁴⁷ The march was peaceful and went through the city ending with a picnic in the Milwaukee Garden, a beer garden.⁴⁸ On May 3rd the crowds gathered to try and begin large scale strikes in the Milwaukee area. At 11:00 am about 400 Polish workers proceeded from the Milwaukee and St. Paul streets into the

⁴³ Gurda, 149

⁴⁴ Thomas W. Gavett, *Development of the Labor Movement in Milwaukee*, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press 1965), 13

⁴⁵ Gavett, 15

⁴⁶ Gavett, 49

⁴⁷ Gavett, 60.

⁴⁸ Gavett, 60.

Menomonee Valley. Their size and influence grew over the next few days, forcing other factories like that of Reliance Works of the E.P. Allis Company to shut down.⁴⁹ By May 5th, the crowd grew to several thousand and advanced towards the Bay View Rolling Mills. The Wisconsin National Guard had been called in the day before, and under orders from the Governor Jeremiah Rusk, they fired on the unruly, unarmed crowd. In the end, five men were killed and another four were wounded.⁵⁰

The Bay View Massacre prompted swift, but ultimately temporary responses. The most effective was the establishment of the People's Party of Wisconsin. Robert Schilling, the leader of the Knights of Labor, organized the party in the summer of 1886.⁵¹ The party was mainly a Populist effort, focusing on progressive reforms like restrictions on child labor, graduated income tax, and arbitration of labor disputes. With the impetus of the Bay View shootings, the People's Party of Wisconsin did well. They took more than half of Milwaukee's state assembly seats and a place in Congress. They kept their steam into the April 1887 elections, where some People's Party city aldermen were added. Yet, by 1888, the party had run its course. While this was the end of the People's Party, Milwaukee's three party politics was just beginning.

In addition to the fight for workers rights, a new dishonest Milwaukee Mayor would also push the city's residents towards the Socialist vote. David

⁴⁹ Gavett, 61.

⁵⁰ "Bay View Labor Riot of 1886." Milwaukee Free Press, July 3, 1910.

<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=933>; accessed on: 7/6/2011.

⁵¹ Gurda, 159.

Stuart Rose was born in 1856 in Darlington, Wisconsin. He would go on to study law and eventually joined his father's firm in his hometown.⁵² Rose had political leanings early in his life; he was twice mayor of Darlington before his 30th birthday. Rose moved to Milwaukee in 1886, as the struggle for labor rights climaxed. There, Rose established a law firm and after over ten years in the Cream City, Rose ran for Mayor of Milwaukee on a Democratic ticket, crafting himself as a reformer. His 'enemies' in his first election were the industrialists and monopolies, especially the "streetcar ring," The Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company (TMER&I), and its high prices and possible monopoly. Many other reformers, like that of Robert Schilling, supported his nomination and Rose won the 1898 election easily.⁵³

Yet Rose was not, in fact, a reformer, but an opportunist who easily changed his political leanings depending on the company he was keeping at the time. When he entered the office, he quickly ceased all 'hostilities' with the streetcar operators, TMER&I, and while fares dropped a cent, operations were extended until 1934, and this did little to dissuade the anger for many of the protested were due to their monopoly in the area.⁵⁴ By 1902, his city administration had been charged with manipulating city financial records.⁵⁵ He was not officially charged with any of the crimes, yet he always kept himself

⁵² Gurda, 199.

⁵³ Gurda, 199.

⁵⁴ Gurda, 199.

⁵⁵ Joseph A. Ranney, "The Political Campaign of Mayor David S. Rose" in *Milwaukee Stories*, ed. Thomas J. Jablonsky (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2005), 410-411.

well clothed – in silk top hats and Prince Albert coats – on the low salary of a Mayor. ⁵⁶

Even after these first scandals, he was appealing to the people of Milwaukee. He had what was described as a ‘forceful’ personality and was very handsome. He became known for his silver tongue, which easily impressed those within earshot.⁵⁷ In 1900, he said: “I believe in winning. Standing up and dying for an alleged principle is damned rot.”⁵⁸ He also had heavy support from those in the powerful Red Light districts. He had even campaigned on both opening and regulating vices such as prostitution, saloons, and gambling. He went as far to claim: “Men are, and always have been, men. They have their natural passions which, in the great majority of cases, must and will be gratified.”⁵⁹

Mayor Rose remained in office for an almost consecutive ten year span, from 1898 to 1910. At this time, Milwaukee’s elections for Mayor were held every two years, and he only lost in 1906 to Sherburn Becker.⁶⁰ Rose effectively used the fear of Socialism to keep his seat, especially in his biggest polling area, the Catholic Polish south side.⁶¹ And he also used control of the city’s water supply as bribes in the poorer Polish wards.⁶² As graft and corruption became evident, Rose’s voting percentages slipped from 55 percent in 1898 to only 37 percent in 1908 so that Milwaukee’s Socialists were in a

⁵⁶ Gurda, 201

⁵⁷ Gurda, 200

⁵⁸ Gurda, 200

⁵⁹ Gurda, 201

⁶⁰ Gurda 202

⁶¹ “David Stuart Rose,” wisconsinhistory.org

⁶² Bayrd Still, “The Development of Milwaukee in the Early Metropolitan Period,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Volume 25, No. 3 (March 1942), 302

position to successfully gain the Mayor's office. Rose saw his downfall, and retired from politics after the 1908 term ended. In April 1910, Emil Seidel, the first Socialist Mayor of Milwaukee, took office.

Siedel's win was not easy, and while the seeds had been sown early in Milwaukee's history, the climb towards the victory began a decade earlier in 1898. There had been several established smaller Socialists parties in the United States throughout the late 1800s. One of the first, the Social Party, was formed in 1868 in New Jersey by F.A. Sorge, but they never rose to national prominence.⁶³ It was during the 1870s that utopian and socialist cooperative ideas were brought in by new German immigrants, like those who came to Milwaukee.⁶⁴ Many 'working-man' parties were established at this time to keep up with the multitude of things that workers were trying to fix; parties such as the Greenback, Single-Tax, Nationalists, and Knights of Labor. Many of these political parties were active in cities that were heavily populated with blue collar workers like New York City, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee.⁶⁵ The Socialist Labor Party, created in 1877, was one such party. And all these did little to affect the national stage.

While there had been Socialist gatherings and politicians before his arrival, the Socialist Party of Milwaukee, found their voice and leader in an Austrian immigrant, Victor Berger.⁶⁶ He was born in Austria-Hungary in 1860

⁶³ Robert C. Reinders, "The Early Career of Daniel W. Hoan: A Study of Socialism in the Progressive Era" (M.A. Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1948), 28.

⁶⁴ Richard W. Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 19-20.

⁶⁵ Judd, 19-20.

⁶⁶ Daniel W. Hoan, *City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936), 71.

and immigrated to the United States in 1878; he settled in Milwaukee three years later. Berger worked as a German teacher in the public schools, and became a central figure in Milwaukee's German community. He was even an officer in the Turner Society. By 1892, Berger had become a Socialist and began to publish the first Socialist newspaper in Milwaukee, *Vorwärts*. ("Forward").⁶⁷ It was Berger who took his understanding of Marxian German Socialism and adapted it to an American environment, presenting it as a solution to an industrial society.⁶⁸ According to modern day scholars, Berger was the "major spokesperson for the moderate faction of Socialism."⁶⁹ It was Berger who pushed the party onto the national spotlight when, in 1895, he visited labor leader Eugene Debs when he was imprisoned in Illinois. There, Berger converted Debs to the Socialist cause.⁷⁰ Debs and Berger would later team up for a bid to the presidency.⁷¹

Berger was also a large driving force behind the establishment of a new Socialist party, Branch One of the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP), in 1897.⁷² This group jumped into Milwaukee's political landscape quickly, nominating a machinist, Robert Meister, for Mayor.⁷³ He was the first to lay out the Socialist's platform for the city, which included: municipal control of utilities, free legal and medical service for the poor, free schoolbooks, and housing

⁶⁷ Gurda, 204-205.

⁶⁸ John Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics: A Play in Four Acts" in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past* ed. Margo J. Anderson and Victory Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 67.

⁶⁹ Judd, 4.

⁷⁰ Gurda, 205.

⁷¹ Meta Berger, *A Milwaukee Woman's Life on the Left: the autobiography of Meta Berger*, ed. Kimberly Swanson (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2001), 9n

⁷² Benoit, 3.

⁷³ Judd, 22.



Figure 1: Formal studio portrait of Eugene Debs and Victor Berger, 1897, from www.wisconsinhistory.net

reform.⁷⁴ The first outing was not successful, only garnering five percent of the vote, most of which was probably from recent German immigrants.⁷⁵ Their fight had just started.

Berger crafted a grassroots organization that slowly moved from the heavy German northwest side of the city, to the middle class and Polish immigrants.⁷⁶ In Seidel's 1938 unpublished autobiography he explained their actions: "We aimed to maintain a local branch in every ward. Among the earliest, we had enough signatures to apply for a 20th Ward Charter. I transferred my membership from Branch 1 to Branch 20."⁷⁷ They organized many different ways to spread their ideas, including newspapers, fliers in several different languages, concerts, lectures and a pamphlet brigade.⁷⁸ They fashioned themselves "realistic socialists" and considered their platform "the American expression of the international movement of modern wage-workers for better food, better houses, sufficient sleep, more leisure, more education, and more culture."⁷⁹

By 1910, Milwaukee's population had grown to over 373,000 people,⁸⁰ and the roll of registered Socialists had reached 17,000 members.⁸¹ The SDP had started to be referred to as 'Sewer' Socialism, for their number one

⁷⁴ Judd, 22.

⁷⁵ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 27.

⁷⁶ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 27-28.

⁷⁷ Emil Seidel, *Autobiography Part I, Part II, and Part III* (unpublished manuscript, 1938), Emil Seidel Papers, 1915-1944, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 79.

⁷⁸ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 28.

⁷⁹ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 28.

⁸⁰ McCarthy, 4.

⁸¹ Ranney, "The Political Campaign of Mayor David S. Rose," 412.

campaign promise: municipal water for all of Milwaukee's citizens.⁸² Seidel wrote in his autobiography, that it was the poor conditions of the city called for socialism.

Some eastern smarties called ours a Sewer Socialism. Yes, we wanted sewers in the workers' homes, but we wanted much, oh – so much more than sewers. We wanted our workers to have pure air; we wanted them to have sunshine, we wanted planning homes; we wanted living wages; we wanted recreation for young and old; we wanted vocational education; we wanted a chance for every human being to be strong and live a life of happiness.⁸³

Their major campaigning paid off. Through the early 1900s, their percentage of the vote rose quickly. In 1902 it was up to 14 percent. In 1904 and 1906 it was almost 30 percent. 1902 also was also the first year in which nine Socialist Councilman were elected to the Common Council.⁸⁴ In the year of victory, 1910, the percentage rose to almost 47 percent.⁸⁵

Socialists gained their support from several areas. The first was the city's already mentioned large Teutonic population. In 1910 half of Milwaukee's population could claim German heritage.⁸⁶ Many of those wards voted towards Socialists. Support from the Catholic Polish, who were 20 percent of population, also moved from Rose to the Socialist cause in 1910.⁸⁷ Earlier support had come from skilled workers within the city, yet by 1910, 57 percent of the male population was working unskilled manufacturing jobs,

⁸² McCarthy, 65.

⁸³ Seidel, 79-80.

⁸⁴ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 28.

⁸⁵ Ranney, "The Political Campaign of Mayor David S. Rose," 419.

⁸⁶ Margo Anderson and Victor Green, "Introduction" in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past* ed. Margo Anderson and Victory Green (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 4.

⁸⁷ Anderson and Green, "Introduction," 4.

who also voted Socialist. And finally, parts of the middle class voted for Seidel, swayed by his promise of an efficient government.⁸⁸

In the final toll, the SDP carried the election. They won a total of sixteen of Milwaukee's twenty-six wards, twenty-one of the thirty-five alderman seats, ten of sixteen county supervisors, and elected two judges. Along with Seidel, Charles B. Whitnall was elected as city treasurer and Daniel Webster Hoan was elected as city attorney.⁸⁹ In the fall elections of 1910, Victor Berger was elected as the first Socialist Congressman to the United States Senate.⁹⁰ Daniel Hoan summed up the experience in his book *City Government*:

The task of rehabilitating Milwaukee's government began in 1910. That year marked the close of a dark period in the city's history. The stewardship of this community had been in the grasp of sinister and slimy hand of special interests, dive keepers, crooked contractors, petty racketeers, and political bosses. This city was then as graft-ridden as any other. Thus the type or characteristics of our population alone will not explain the reasons for our continued good government during the years that followed. There is another explanation, and it lies in the philosophy of government I have endeavored [Socialism]...⁹¹

Socialism was now poised to take on the ills of the city, with Emil Seidel at its helm.

Seidel was born in 1864 in Ashland, Pennsylvania and moved to Milwaukee in 1869. He was trained as a wood carver and spent several years in Germany honing his craft while being exposed to their leftist government

⁸⁸ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 27-28.

⁸⁹ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 28-29.

⁹⁰ Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics," 28-29.

⁹¹ Daniel Hoan, *City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), x.

tendencies.⁹² After returning to Milwaukee, he joined the Pattern Makers Union. He was one of the founding members of the new Social Democratic

Party in 1898. Before running for mayor, Seidel was elected as a Socialist alderman in the 20th ward of the city.⁹³

With Seidel's election, Milwaukee became the leader in the United State's Socialist party. The new mayor used his new position to begin the reforms that his party campaigned for. Based on fiscal responsibility, Seidel first worked to reform the interior of City Hall.

Projects were put on hold when they lacked proper funding.⁹⁴ A new Bureau

of Economy and Efficiency was developed, which studied the workings of the city's government to rid the system of graft and poor finances. And the first survey of the city's property took place.⁹⁵ Seidel also began to tackle the social



Figure 2: Emil Seidel, from Milwaukee Sentinel, April 6th, 1910, from www.jsoline.com/archives

⁹² Wisconsinhistory.org, accessed 10-15-2011

⁹³ Wisconsinhistory.org, accessed 10-15-2011

⁹⁴ Benoit, 4-5.

⁹⁵ Gurda, 215.

ills of Milwaukee such as public health and education reform,⁹⁶ and began to develop an idea for a cooperative housing.⁹⁷

Seidel's enduring legacy was the support of City Treasurer and amateur planner, Charles Whitnall, who has become known as the father of city planning in Milwaukee. Whitnall deeply felt that much of the social ills that were negatively impacted the city's working class came down to a poorly planned city which lacked proper light and green space. He once said,

The individual does not create his own environment. But the environment does determine a great extent how the individual shall develop. This means that every citizen of Milwaukee who has grown up here is the product of influences for which the city as a whole is largely responsible, for the people as a whole are able to adapt and modify and even create environment . . . The fact that the health of our people cannot be maintained without proper environmental influences, is too well established for discussion. Furthermore, the conduct or character of people in what we call the dependent and criminal classes is determined the same way. These people are those who withstand devitalizing environment the longest. The others simply perish. The impoverishment of the body necessitates the impoverishment of the mind, which is the forerunner to crime.⁹⁸

His emphasis on decentralization had ramifications for the city, and for other socialist plans, in the city and the county.

Seidel could not hold his position for long for several reasons. The first was the growing alliance of Democrats and Republicans who were angry their majority was upset. Changing state laws in 1912, party labels were taken off the ballot, and instead politicians were to use a five word slogans instead – and

⁹⁶ Benoit, 4-5.

⁹⁷ McCarthy, 4.

⁹⁸ Charles B. Whitnall, *Milwaukee City Planning*, (Milwaukee: Co-operative Printery, 1911), 4

a Nonpartisan Party developed to attack Seidel from both sides.⁹⁹ Some historians have suggested that the Socialists were too successful. They quickly tackled the main ills of the city, which could have destroyed the voters mind set in needing reformers in office.¹⁰⁰ In 1912, Seidel lost his bid for reelection, along with Whitnall, but Daniel Hoan remained in office as City Attorney.¹⁰¹

Socialism in Milwaukee rose out of the graft and corruption of the Gilded Age. German immigrants had brought the seed over and allowed for it to grow among its citizens. While there had been other Socialist organizations started around the country, it was the Social Democratic Party, or SDP, that was founded and took root in Milwaukee in 1898. Although it took over a decade to establish a united front against the two-party system in Milwaukee, the SDP won a hard fought victory in 1910. While they were not able to hold onto their position of power for more than the two-year first term of Emil Siedel, they did put many of their ideas into action, including the use of city planning as a way to fight society's ills. Probably even more important, Charles Whitnall and Daniel Hoan were brought to City Hall. These two men would go on to affect Milwaukee's plans for decades to come. Emil Siedel himself, in his autobiography, outlined the Socialists plans for planning:

And we wanted everything that was necessary to give them that [happiness]: playgrounds, parks, lakes, beaches, clean creeks and rivers, swimming and wading pools, social centers, reading rooms, clean fun, music, dance, song and joy for all. That was our Milwaukee Social Democratic movement. There was but one way to get all of that—GO AFTER IT AND GET IT.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Gurda, 220.

¹⁰⁰ Gurda, 220.

¹⁰¹ "Results," *Milwaukee Leader*, 4 April 1912.

¹⁰² Siedel, 80.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Brief Biography of Charles Whitnall: Florist, Banker, Planner

Charles B. Whitnall spent over forty years of his life planning for the city and county of Milwaukee. Like many others at this time, he was not a trained planner; but his passion came from a combination of a love of natural beauty, Garden Cities, and Socialist ideas. Spurred by the decreasing green space around the city, Whitnall preached for decentralization. He believed that men, women, and children would live better where they could be a part of nature, instead of visiting just visiting small, cramped beer gardens on Sundays. It was Whitnall who was the often unsung, but driving force behind the Socialists planning platforms.

Whitnall's family and upbringing likely were a large influence on his planning beliefs. His father was an English immigrant who used his large homestead outside Milwaukee to begin a floriculture business, often working with friends and family members in the area. Whitnall grew up among large open spaces, alongside the Milwaukee River, and with trees and flowers everywhere. Often, it was this environment as the ideal that Whitnall would advocate for when planning Milwaukee for the working class. Whitnall would join the flower business in his teens, and take over the business when his father moved to the West Coast in his retirement.

After taking over the business, Whitnall grew the business even further, and became recognized in his own right as a premiere Milwaukee florist in his own right. He would also join the national movement of florists, by becoming a

Pioneer member of the newfound Society of American Florists, where he proved to be quite active. It was during a regional conference of the Society of American Florists where Whitnall would propose one of the first flowers by telegraph services, which later inspired what is now Florist Telegraph Delivery or FTD.

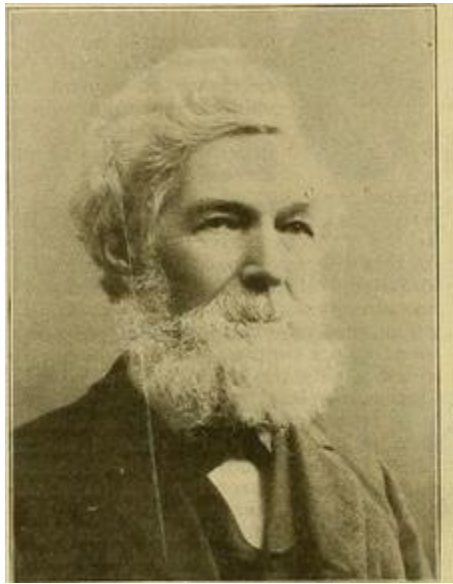


Figure 3: Frank Whitnall, circa 1900. From "The Late Frank Whitnall," from *The American Florist*, Volume 2, No. 850, from www.archive.org.

Along with being active in the national florist trade, Whitnall was active in the Milwaukee community, and was one of the first members of the new SDP. It was here that he met many of the men and women who would support him when he later would run for City Treasurer and when he became active in City Planning.

Charles B. Whitnall was born on January 21st, 1859 in a house at 1208 E.

Locust Street, though at that time it was known as the 'country.'¹⁰³ His father, Frank Whitnall, born March 16 1830, immigrated from Kent England to the United States in the mid-1840s at the age of sixteen.¹⁰⁴ According to his obituary in the *Milwaukee Journal*, when Frank arrived on the pier off Milwaukee at night, he walked about until he found his older brother, William Whitnall's, sign and house painting shop and stayed there until the workers

¹⁰³ H. Russell Zimmerman, "Quaint Old Whitnall Home is Durable," *The Past In Our Present*, (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Journal, 1967-1974).

¹⁰⁴ The American Florist Company, "Obituary Frank Whitnall," *The American Florist* Volume 23 Number 850 (Sept 17 1904): 315, accessed July 1, 2012. <http://archive.org>.

came in to work the next morning.¹⁰⁵ Frank worked as a painter for a few years, along with two other brothers that had also immigrated: Charles and John.¹⁰⁶ Later, he spent some time studying either chemistry, biology, botany, or a combination of the three at Oberlin College, possibly by correspondence in the winter months.¹⁰⁷ Frank married Granville schoolteacher Elizabeth (or Eliza) Jane Byrnes sometime in the 1850s.¹⁰⁸ Charles B. was their only child.¹⁰⁹

The first home built on the 20 acres of the “Whitnall Knoll” was constructed around 1851 and was most likely a basement dwelling with steps leading up to the ground level.¹¹⁰ Frank, with later help from his son, built additions throughout the 1860s and 1870s.¹¹¹ The cottage is still extant, built of brick, and has 12 rooms on six separate levels, including a sub-basement which still has its original dirt floor, and twenty-two doors.¹¹² This home is locally designated as a Milwaukee landmark and has managed to survive in its relatively original condition. This is partially due to the fact that only two families have ever owned the home. The building remained in the Whitnall family until 1950 when Emma Whitnall, daughter of the elder Uncle Charles

¹⁰⁵ “Funeral of Leading Florist,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 12 September 1904.

¹⁰⁶ The American Florist Company, “Obituary Frank Whitnall” Volume 23 Number 850(September 17, 1904), 315.

¹⁰⁷ Frances Stover “House of Philosophy and Flowers,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 25 July 1953, 6. Suggests that he continued his studies at Oberlin in the winter months after Charles was born is the only source to suggest this. All others suggest he did his coursework before Charles was born.

¹⁰⁸ John Gregory, “Charles B. Whitnall,” *History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin*, (Chicago, Ill.: S J Clarke, 1930), 328.”

¹⁰⁹ Gregory, “Charles B. Whitnall,” 328.

¹¹⁰ Zimmerman, “Quaint Old Whitnall Home is Durable”.

¹¹¹ Zimmerman, “Quaint Old Whitnall Home is Durable”.

¹¹² Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission “Whitnall House Historic Designation Study Report,” (1998), 2, accessed May 1, 2012, <http://city.milwaukee.gov/hpc/LocalDesignations>.

Whitnall, died.¹¹³ It was then bought by Robert and Jean Holzhauer in 1951. In a 1953 article “A House of Philosophy and Flowers” from the *Milwaukee Journal*, “The Locust house, strictly kept in its original state by the Holzhauers, is really the Milwaukee memorial to C.B. Whitnall . . . and to his father.”¹¹⁴ Their son, Kurt Holzhauer, now lives in the home.¹¹⁵



Figure 4: Side view of Whitnall Home, taken May 2012, photograph by author

¹¹³ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 4.

¹¹⁴ Stover, “House of Philosophy and Flowers”.

¹¹⁵ Kurt Holzhauer, interview by author, May 2012.



Figure 5: Front view of Whitnall home, taken May 2012, photography by author



Figure 6: View of Whitnall home on Dousman Street. Charles Whitnall died in this house in 1949, taken May 2012, photograph by author.

The Whitnall Knoll appeared to be a gathering place for both sides of the family. Another home was built on the property sometime in the 1870s, now 2942 N. Dousman Street. Meanwhile, Frank's brother Charles, his wife Mary, and their daughter Emma began living in the older cottage.¹¹⁶ Frank's other brother, William Whitnall, would also be registered as living with them in the 1880s and worked with C.B. in the floral trade. And Frank R. Ellis, a future business partner and cousin to Mrs. Frank Whitnall, also lived on what would become Humboldt Avenue (now Locust Avenue).¹¹⁷

In 1860, Frank Whitnall used his knowledge of floricultural to open a nursery on his property.¹¹⁸ By 1862, he had opened retail floral and seed shop at 281 Main Street with a partner, Carl Schirmmacher¹¹⁹, operating as Schirmmacher & Whitnall.¹²⁰ The partnership split up around 1865 when Carl opened another seed and floral store with Randolph A. Koss.¹²¹ Frank ran his own seed shop until about 1867 when he joined with Eliza's cousin, Ellis¹²², and Whitnall & Ellis opened.¹²³

¹¹⁶ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 4.

¹¹⁷ *Wright's Milwaukee City Directory*, (Kansas City, MO: Wright Directory Co., 1867).

¹¹⁸ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 3.

¹¹⁹ According to Milwaukee City Directories of the time, Carl Schirmmacher also lived on Humboldt Avenue.

¹²⁰ *Wright's Milwaukee City Directory*, (Kansas City, MO: Wright Directory Co., 1862).

¹²¹ *Wright's Milwaukee City Directory* (Kansas City, MO: Wright Directory Co, 1865).

¹²² This is also when Ellis also appears to have moved in with the Whitnall family, or at least to the area

¹²³ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 3.

Entering the spacious hot-houses we were ushered into a scene of tropical splendor. We found there every conceivable summer flower in full bloom, presenting a scene of gorgeousness seldom seen in this latitude. The aroms from the flowers and plants filled the rooms with a most delicious odor, making one fancy that he was in fairy land, drinking in the perfumes wafted to him on every breeze. These gentlemen have been in the nursery business for many years, and have built up an extensive trade in flowers and evergreens. Their hot-houses contain every variety of verbenas, geraniums, roses, heliotropes, zalias, fuchsias, and in fact every flower in the botanical catalogue, whether rare or common, and is such abundance as to seem almost inexhaustible. They supply orders for bouquets at all seasons of the year with promptitude; and to say that their bouquets are splendidly arranged is not enough, as a specimen on our table will testify.¹²⁴

The greenhouses were located on the Whitnall Knoll and their store was first on 55 Division Street; around 1871 the store moved to 428 Milwaukee Street and would remain there until 1891.¹²⁵ Whitnall & Ellis split ways in 1874 when Ellis sold his shares to the store and opened his own office.¹²⁶ The business then became known as Frank Whitnall & Co.¹²⁷

Frank Whitnall & Co. would become the premiere floral business in the city. Frank continued to add to his greenhouse. In February 1875 the *Milwaukee Sentinel* called Whitnall “the celebrated florist” and reported that he would be adding a “mammoth greenhouse” that would “be one of the largest of the kind in the country.”¹²⁸ The greenhouses would grow to

¹²⁴ “A Flowery Theme” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 12 April 1867.

¹²⁵ “Removal” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 9 March 1871.

¹²⁶ Frank Abial Flower (attributed) *History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin: from pre-historic times to the present date, embracing a summary sketch of the native tribes, and an exhaustive record of men and events for the past century; describing, the city, its commercial, religious, educational and benevolent institutions, its government, courts, press, and public affairs; and including nearly four thousand biographical sketches of pioneers and citizens*, (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1881), 1538

¹²⁷ Flower, 1538

¹²⁸ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 22 February 1875.

encompass over 30,000 square feet.¹²⁹ The Whitnall Knoll became “one of the most attractive of the many beautiful places in Milwaukee.”¹³⁰ Called “a progressive,” Whitnall’s facilities improved the growing of flowers. Instead of each hot-house having its own furnace, he instead wanted one furnace to supply heat to them all. His 308 foot hot-house was believed to be the longest in the country and was said to have a double-gable “saving perhaps 10 degrees of heat.”¹³¹ Later, in October 1876, Frank Whitnall again was praised for his operation in an article about the popularity of flowers in the community.

No better illustration of the growth of this taste for flowers can be found in this city, than in noting the development of the wide-famed establishment of Frank Whitnall. Only a few years since, comparatively, one small greenhouse supplied the demand made for choice flowers. Year by year the increasing request made the necessity for great facilities, until now he has the largest establishment in the Northwest.¹³²

Thus Charles B. Whitnall would grow up among his family and flowers in the Wisconsin countryside. In his childhood he was educated first by his mother, then at Mrs. Hyslop’s school, and finally at the Milwaukee Academy.¹³³ Another scholar described his upbringing: “Whitnall held the contemporary bourgeois association of nature with moral uplift. He also developed an appreciation for the qualities of bucolic nature that surrounded his home.”¹³⁴ Though Charles would not always stay in the floral business, his

¹²⁹ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 3.

¹³⁰ “Floriculture” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* Sept. 1875

¹³¹ “Floriculture” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* Sept 1875

¹³² “Nature’s Fine Art” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 18 October 1876.

¹³³ Gregory, “Charles B. Whitnall,” 328.

¹³⁴ Lorne Platt “Planning Ideology and Geographic Thought in the Early Twentieth Century: Charles Whitnall’s Progressive Era Park Designs for Socialist Milwaukee,” *Journal of Urban History*, 36 No. 6 (2010): 771.

first impressions and deep attachment to nature would stay with him and influence his work in the years to come.

The 'Knoll' area appears to have attracted a number men and women who were interested in art, philosophy, and education. All four of the Whitnall brothers - Frank, Charles, William, and John - were said to have "strong intelligence and unusual abstemiousness in their personal habits" and friends claimed their English mother instilled her own "strong, refined and moral nature."¹³⁵ Frank himself was called a philosopher in his own right: "few men had so wide a scope of general information or were so well read in the modern thought of the day."¹³⁶ Neighbors were also educated; Bernard Isaac Durward was said to be a poet and scholar lived in the area.¹³⁷ The Gordon Family who owned a farm next to the Whitnalls lived in an octagon house and were said to have artists and poets visit frequently. Whitnall played with, and ultimately married, their daughter Annie Gordon in early 1883.¹³⁸ Their son, George Gordon Whitnall, was born in 1888.¹³⁹ The tradition appears to have continued into the twentieth century; according to a 1974 recounting by Jean Holzhauer:

In our time, 1208 housed both W.H. Auden and Dylan Thomas on their respective lecture tours, as well as various other visiting Elks. Auden was fascinated, and asked for a guided tour. "It looked like an English cottage!" he said, and I [Jean] told him that was only proper since an English family had built it. Thomas peed in the rose bushes and sat up all night drinking, despite my efforts to get him to bed in the freshly clean and prepared guest room."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ "Whitnall Funeral Today" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 13 September 1904.

¹³⁶ Whitnall Funeral Today"

¹³⁷ Stover, "House of Philosophy and Flowers".

¹³⁸ 'Legals' *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 1 March 1883.

¹³⁹ "Guide to the Gordon and Brysis Whitnall Papers, 1913-1975," accessed July 15, 2012 <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/ead/html/docs/RMMo288o.html>

¹⁴⁰ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 5.

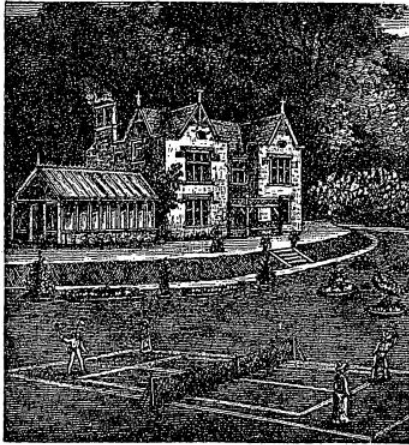
Though accounts differ, Charles probably started working at his father's store by the time Frank Whitnall and Ellis split ways, around the age of fifteen or sixteen.¹⁴¹ Whitnall took to the business quickly, propelling the firm forward. They were, reportedly, the first firm in Milwaukee to sell and decorate with potted plants and palms.¹⁴² In 1876, supposedly after his son's suggestion, Whitnall & Co. had a telegraph line installed between his store in Milwaukee and his garden, ensuring speedy service for his customers.¹⁴³ Two

years later they installed a telephone system¹⁴⁴, which was promoted in *History of Milwaukee* from 1881.¹⁴⁵ Frank retired from the business around 1888 when he and Eliza moved out to Los Angeles.¹⁴⁶ The Knoll and the business, now C.B. Whitnall & Co.,

Figure 7: C.B. Whitnall & Co. Ad, from Yenowine's News, April 28, 1889, from <http://0-infotrac.galegroup.com.countycat.mcfls.org/>

Whitnall's Lawn Grass Seed

LAWN
VASES
FILLED.



FLOWER
BEDS
DESIGNED
—AND—
PLATTED.

25c PER POUND, 15c PER HALF POUND. CLUMP'S
HARDY FERNS, 25c EACH.

C. B. Whitnall & Co.,

—SEEDSMEN & FLORISTS,—

¹⁴¹ Gregory, "Charles B. Whitnall," 328.

¹⁴² "Charles Whitnall biographical sketch, University of Wisconsin – Madison, archives, 1.

¹⁴³ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 18 August 1876.

¹⁴⁴ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 5 March 1878.

¹⁴⁵ Flower, 1538

¹⁴⁶ "Whinal Funeral Today," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 13 September 1904.

were left to Charles.¹⁴⁷

C.B. Whitnall & Co. continued to be an indispensable part of Milwaukee's floral business. They were often mentioned in the local newspapers of the day as the decorators for many social situations.

Messrs Whitnall & Company . . . furnish first class stock for lawn decoration, such as shrubbery, ornamental trees, hardy perennials, bulbs, clematis, and other vines, etc. and have a choice stock of flower seeds, of which the branch of trade they make a specialty. Decorations for churches, parlors, halls, etc. suitable for all occasions are promptly furnished and also cut flowers and floral designs. ¹⁴⁸

In 1878, Whitnall began to develop a wholesale flower business and by 1889 he had incorporated under the name The Wisconsin Flower Exchange along with his father's old business partner and relative Frank Ellis, his uncle William



Figure 8: Wisconsin Flower Exchange Ad, from *The American Florist* Volume 28, No. 254, from www.archive.org

Whitnall, Bryon Walter, and Benjamin Gregory.¹⁴⁹ The Exchange started with \$2000 capital and the 200 stockholders who were “confined to home men, and it was considered advisable to include the purchase of bulbs, seeds, putty, paints, etc. for the reason that it

¹⁴⁷ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 4.

¹⁴⁸ “C.B. Whitnall & Co. Florists” *Yenowine’s News*, 1 April 1890. Accessed through infotrac.galegroup.com.

¹⁴⁹ “General City News,” *Milwaukee Daily Journal*, 30 November 1889, access through infotrac.galegroup.com

was desired to spread the business over considerable territory.”¹⁵⁰ This later dissolved simply into ordinary commission of cut flowers. In 1893 it was compared favorably to commissions in Boston and New York and the charge to members for purchasing was at 10 percent and for selling at 15 percent.¹⁵¹ The exchange did well for a number of years under Whitnall until 1897 when it became insolvent and the business was sold to another Milwaukee flower shop, Holton & Hunkel, where it continued to work on commission at 15 per cent.¹⁵²

In May of 1891, the business moved to 438 Milwaukee Street, and over 600 visitors were reported to coming to the opening.¹⁵³ By the February of 1894, the firm changed its name for the final time to the Whitnall Floral Company, with a reported capital of \$5000.¹⁵⁴ Whitnall now shared the company with his Uncle William, who acted as Vice-President, and his wife Annie G. Whitnall, who was appointed secretary.¹⁵⁵ The new firm continued to be praised by its contemporaries, “In no country in the world is more money expended on flowers than in the United States and the representative house in the city of Milwaukee is unquestionably that of the Whitnall Floral Company.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the annual convention of the society, 1902*, Volume 18 (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, 1902).

¹⁵¹ American Florist Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for Trade*, Volume 8 Number 246, 16 February 1893.

¹⁵² Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the annual convention of the society, 1902*, Volume 18 (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, 1902).

American Florist Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for Trade*, , Volume 6, Number 157, June 4 1891

¹⁵⁴ “General City News” *Milwaukee Journal* , 26 February 1894.

¹⁵⁵ *Milwaukee, a half century's progress, 1846-1896: a review of the Cream City's wonderful growth and development from incorporation until the present time*, (Milwaukee, Wis: Consolidated Illustrating Co, 1896) 211.

¹⁵⁶ *Milwaukee – A Half Century 's Progress*, 211.



Figure 10: Annie Gordon Whitnall in 1892, from *The American Florist, Convention Supplement, Volume 8, No. 219*, from www.archive.org



Figure 9: Charles B. Whitnall in 1892, from *The American Florist, Convention Supplement, Volume 8, No. 219*, from www.archive.org

As well-respected business leaders, Charles and Annie, along with his parents, were a part of the Milwaukee society and were often mentioned in the personal columns for the parties they attended or had thrown, often providing the decorations. The families were also part of many clubs and societies. Across his lifetime, C.B. alone was active in the Masonic Organization, City Club, Isaac Walton League, National Geographic, National Civic Association, State Historical Society, American Institute of Park Executives, Milwaukee School Board, and the School of Agriculture.¹⁵⁷ Annie Whitnall would become active in Milwaukee Public schools and be elected to the Milwaukee Board herself in the early 1900s.¹⁵⁸ In 1895, Charles, Annie, and Uncle William, became founding members of the Milwaukee Ethical Society whose purpose was to “develop the best intentions of the human mind with intelligent study and investigation.”¹⁵⁹ Whitnall and his uncle would also join the Men’s Club,

¹⁵⁷ “Undated Whitnall Biography” University of Wisconsin – Madison archives, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Berger, 28

¹⁵⁹ “Milwaukee Ethical Society,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 September 1895.

an auxiliary. The Ethnical Society was a “Fabian-inspired” group, which was an English branch of socialism who favored an incremental approach to reforming capitalist society.¹⁶⁰ It was during a speech in from the Milwaukee Ethnical Society in July of 1897 that Branch One of the Socialist Democratic Party was founded. The entire society was reported to have joined the new political group.¹⁶¹ It was here that Whitnall met Emil Seidel, who he would later serve with in City Hall. Whitnall was the first choice for City Treasurer in the first Socialist election of 1898, but had to drop out for an undisclosed reason.¹⁶²

The Whitnall family would come in contact with many of the prominent players in the upcoming Socialist Party, such as Frederick Heath, Meta Berger, and Carl Sandburg. Heath was also a founding member of the Ethical Society and Berger, wife of Victor Berger, served on the School Board with Annie, and was a close personal friend. Whitnall became friends with the Socialist poet, Carl Sandburg, through his wife Lilian Steichen. She gave one of the few descriptions of Whitnall’s demeanor: “Edward [Steichen’s brother] used always to compare him [Whitnall] to Christ. When Edward was about twenty W used to wear a beard so that he really resembled the old-master pictures of Christ . . . W is just *that: The Man of Sorrows*.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ McCarthy, 20.

¹⁶¹ Marvin Wachman, *History of the Social-democratic party of Milwaukee, 1897-1910*, (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1945), 9.

¹⁶² “A Representative Workingman,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 2 February 1898, “Brief Political Notes,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 22 February 1898

¹⁶³ Margaret Sandburg, ed., *The Poet and the Dream Girl: The Love Letters of Lilian Steichen and Carl Sandburg*, (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 53.

Whitnall also became the subject of a Victorian ‘human interest’ piece around the country. When a friend and student of “oriental religions who had a leaning toward belief in the Buddhist theory of transmigration of souls,” died in 1892 he asked to be buried on the Whitnall property. This attracted notice of several local and regional newspapers. Before C. Jerome Cary died, he would visit the greenhouses every Sunday to spend time around the rosebushes and Whitnall.¹⁶⁴ During his lifetime, and again on his death bed he had relatives promise to bury his ashes under Cary’s favorite rose bush, “which enjoys more than a local reputation” in the Whitnall greenhouses.¹⁶⁵ After his death, his body was shipped to Detroit for cremation and then his ashes were collected and expressly shipped back to Milwaukee.¹⁶⁶ A local Wisconsin poet, Eben E. Rexford, even composed a poem for the occasion, which Whitnall would include in his later publications. (See Appendix)

In the late 1880s, Whitnall began to cultivate his national presence outside of Milwaukee floriculture. In 1884, he became a “pioneer” member of the Society of American Florists (SAF), the first group of its kind in the country for those working in horticulture.¹⁶⁷ His father, Frank, was also active in the SAF for two years and served as Vice President, or the head of the Wisconsin Chapter, in 1885.¹⁶⁸ Charles served as the Wisconsin Vice President seven times between 1889 and 1900. In 1886, Whitnall sat on the SAF Executive

¹⁶⁴ “Roses Bloomed from his ashes” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 24 January 1897.

¹⁶⁵ “Roses Bloomed from his ashes.”

¹⁶⁶ “Will rest at a florists,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 April 1892.

¹⁶⁷ Gregory, “Charles B. Whitnall,” 328.

¹⁶⁸ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society, 1884*, Volume 1, (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, 1884).

Committee.¹⁶⁹ The SAF was chartered by an Act of Congress in 1901 and celebrated its 125th Anniversary in 2009.¹⁷⁰ Even after leaving the floral business, Whitnall continued to be a dues paying member of the Society. One year after the first meeting of the SAF, a trade magazine, *The American Florist*, was also put together. Whitnall served as a director and contributor until it was reorganized in 1926; Anne also served as a part-owner, remaining on even after her eventual split with Whitnall in 1911.¹⁷¹

In July 1891, Whitnall traveled to Chicago for an informal meeting with the members of the SAF.¹⁷² At that meeting he put forth an idea.

Our desire is to make it simple and easy for a man in Milwaukee, Chicago, New York or any other point to convey a bouquet [sic] to a lady friend or some sick friend at any other accessible point with lightning speed, without starting it from the place he may be. For instance take a person here in Milwaukee having a friend arriving or leaving on an ocean steamer in New York. He simply has to walk into the store of our agent here and give his order. The order is at once telegraphed to another agent of the association in the place where the flowers are to be delivered, and there you are the bouquet is promptly delivered. The idea is something new, novel, and unique and 'flowers by telegraph' is a pleasure of the future.¹⁷³

The organization was effected and was named Florists' International Telegraphic Delivery Association with Whitnall voted as president.¹⁷⁴ A membership was established in the larger cities in United States and Canada

¹⁶⁹ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society 1885*, Volume 2, (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, 1885).

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.safnow.org/a-brief-history-of-saf> accessed 6-12-2012

¹⁷¹ "Undated Whitnall Biography," University of Wisconsin – Madison Archives, 1.

¹⁷² "Flowers by Telegraph" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 13 December 1891.

¹⁷³ "You May Send Flowers" *Milwaukee Journal*, 30 September 1891.

¹⁷⁴ "Flowers by Telegraph."

and a constitution and by-laws were updated.¹⁷⁵ A “cypher code” was made to be used for the ease of telegraphing orders in between cities.¹⁷⁶ There would be one member from each city in the United States and Canada, and possibly abroad in Europe.¹⁷⁷ The advertising would to be done by each individual who was part of the Association.¹⁷⁸ By October 1891, Whitnall had applied for the official trademark of the company, “The pictorial representation of a line of telegraph poles and wires, with a cornucopia of floral products adjacent to one of said poles and flowers and vines extending from said cornucopia along said wires in connection with the words “Telegraph Delivery.””¹⁷⁹



Figure 11: Ad for the Florists' International Delivery Service in *The American Florist*, Volume 13, No. 520, from www.archive.org

The next year, at the Eighth Annual Convention of the SAF in 1892 in Toronto, the Florists' International Telegraphic Delivery Association held their first annual meeting, elected a new board of managers, and updated their by-

¹⁷⁵ “Flowers by Telegraph.”

¹⁷⁶ “Flowers by Telegraph.”

¹⁷⁷ *The American Florist*, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 7 Number 174 (Chicago: American Florist Company, 1891) 1 October 1891.

¹⁷⁸ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society*, 1892, Volume 8 (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, 1892).

¹⁷⁹ United States Patent Office, *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office*, (The Office, 1892), 1136 (Patent Number: 20,425).

laws.¹⁸⁰ Whitnall presided over the meeting stating: “The progress of our Association for its first year of existence should, I think, be considered satisfactory. The accomplishments, you will note . . . shows that the public has shown their appreciation of the opportunities offered in proportion to the manner in which our members have made them acquainted with our enterprise.”¹⁸¹ It was reported that during their first year of business the company claimed a profit of \$1641.94.¹⁸² In 1893, the business expanded from 39 members to 58 members.¹⁸³ By 1894, Whitnall was no longer president, but was still on the board of managers.¹⁸⁴ The company continued, but struggled through the next few years, with annual meetings being advertised in *The American Florist* in 1896 and 1899.¹⁸⁵ The business appears to have dried up in the early 1900s. By that time, however, another florist from Denver, Colorado had joined the SAF – J.A. Valentine.¹⁸⁶ In 1910, Valentine would start his own business of floral delivery under the umbrella of the SAF Florists’ Telegraph Delivery Service or FTD. While in the early years articles that ran in *American Florist* gave credit to Whitnall, even calling him “the originator of

¹⁸⁰ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society*, 1892, Volume 8 (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, 1892).

¹⁸¹ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society*, 1892.

¹⁸² <http://www.safnow.org/a-brief-history-of-saf> accessed 6-12-2012

¹⁸³ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society*, 1893, Volume 9 (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, 1893)

¹⁸⁴ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society*, 1894, Volume 10 (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, 1894).

¹⁸⁵ American Florists Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for Trade*, (Chicago: American Florist Company: 1896, 1899)

¹⁸⁶ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society*, 1899, Volume 15 (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturists, 1899), 144.

the Telegraph Delivery Service,” in the 1960s history *Flowers-by-the-wire: The Story of the Florists’ Telegraph Delivery Association*, Whitnall is ignored, and the business is unnamed.¹⁸⁷ Throughout his life, Whitnall continued to assert he was the founder of a Florists Telegraph Delivery Association.

In 1896, Whitnall retired from “activity in the retail trade,” and in 1898 the Whitnall Floral Company was sold to Alexander Klokner.¹⁸⁸ The greenhouses would remain in Whitnall’s hands and would continue to supply downtown dealers and be used “in connection with a decorating business conducted by Charles B. Whitnall.”¹⁸⁹ While his retirement from the floral business has sometimes been linked to the passing of Frank Whitnall in 1904, Whitnall actually retired from the florist business in 1902 and began to rent out his greenhouses to Holton & Hunkel.¹⁹⁰ In *American Florist*, Whitnall claimed the move to now to work entirely in landscape work, but it is relevant to note this was also the year that he separated from his childhood sweetheart, Annie.¹⁹¹

Whitnall may have taken on landscaping work, but he also began to work at a local bank, the Citizens’ Trust Company.¹⁹² Claiming to be one of the oldest trust companies in the city, the business began, unofficially in 1857, by

¹⁸⁷ American Florists Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 47 Number 1481, 21 October 1916 (Chicago: American Florist Company, 1916).

¹⁸⁸ American Florists Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 14 Number 535, 3 September 1898, (Chicago: American Florist Company, 1898).

¹⁸⁹ Greenhouses change hands. The Whitnall Floral Company Succeeded by Alexander Klokner” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 11 September 1898.

¹⁹⁰ American Florists Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 18 Number 730, 31 May 1902 (Chicago: American Florists Company, 1902).

¹⁹¹ Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 4.

¹⁹² “Undated Whitnall Biography” University of Wisconsin – Madison, 5.

lawyer Nathan Pereles.¹⁹³ Pereles had been born in Hungary in 1824, immigrated to America in 1845, and settled in Milwaukee in 1847.¹⁹⁴ At first he ran a grocery and seed store, but by 1854 he began to study law. He was admitted to practice in 1857,¹⁹⁵ and he began “making loans, looking after the settlement of estates, and transacting other likes of business.”¹⁹⁶ The business was officially incorporated in 1897. His sons James M. Pereles and Thomas J. Pereles appear as president and vice-president respectively in 1906.¹⁹⁷

Whitnall appears to have met and first worked with T. J. Pereles in 1887. When Annie’s father, George Gordon, died, he left behind a hefty fortune that no one knew he had possessed.¹⁹⁸ The trustees to his will were Mr. C.B. Whitnall and Mr. T.J. Pereles.¹⁹⁹ Two years later, the C.B. Whitnall & Co. purchased the old “Gordon Place,” from Pereles and then offered it up for rent as a summer home.²⁰⁰

Whitnall joined the Citizens’ Trust Company in 1902 as the Treasurer. He was obviously versed in some aspects of banking, having run several businesses. He also continued to use his connection in the floral world, running ads for the bank in the *American Florist*. Though it is not clear why, Whitnall “cut ties” with the bank and quit working for the company in 1907.²⁰¹

¹⁹³ Lieutenant Colonel Jerome A. Watrous, ed., *Memoirs of Milwaukee County: from the earliest historical times down to the present, including a genealogical and biographical record of representative families in Milwaukee County, Volume 1* (Madison, WI: Western Historical Association, 1909), 572.

¹⁹⁴ Watrous, 552.

¹⁹⁵ Watrous, 552.

¹⁹⁶ Watrous, 572.

¹⁹⁷ *Wright’s Milwaukee City Directory*, (Kansas City, Mo: Wright DirectoryCo., 1906)

¹⁹⁸ “A Fortune to Charity” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 6 September 1887.

¹⁹⁹ “A Fortune to Charity.”

²⁰⁰ “The Gordon Place on the River,” *Yenowine’s News*, 30 June 1889.

²⁰¹ “Undated Whitnall Biography” University of Wisconsin – Madison archives, 5.

It is possible Whitnall fell out with the brothers after their legal troubles. On July 6, 1907 the *Milwaukee Journal* announced that both brothers, along with other officers and stockholders of the Wisconsin Coal Mining Co. and Federal Coal and Iron Co. were indicted by a federal grand jury in Denver for allegedly taking more land than the law allows.²⁰² Whatever the reason, it was clear in later comments from Whitnall that the parting was not a happy one. In that same year, he began to take an active role in the Milwaukee planning community as he was appointed to the Metropolitan Park Commission and the Milwaukee County Park Commission.²⁰³

Whitnall's interests in the natural world and planning, along with his studies in Fabian Socialism began to develop into something greater around the turn of the century. In 1903, when the SAF annual convention was held in Milwaukee, Whitnall gave a speech titled "The Decoration of Home Grounds." The speech not only touched on how one should decorate their lands or gardens, but it also became a building block for his later 1906 self-published piece on the importance of city parks.

The attempt of a gardener to harmonize these differences can only be a compromise, which in time may gradually evolve into a new order of things and become natural: then it may be beautiful, not before. Although there may be much in nature lacking beauty, nothing can be beautiful unless it conforms to the requirements of nature.²⁰⁴

²⁰² "Act Within Law," *Milwaukee Journal*, 6 July 1907.

²⁰³ The Pereles Brothers were later cleared from all wrong doing.

²⁰⁴ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society, 1903*, Volume 19, (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, 1903).

The speech also is the first time he addresses about a natural versus unnatural walkway, one of the central aspects behind his 1906 booklet. In this speech, one can clearly see his disdain for the ‘created’ natural landscape, like the famous designs of landscape planner, Frederick Law Olmsted.

There is not much known about Whitnall’s original 1906 booklet. It was said to be self-published and released sometime in January. It is credited with the development of a new city commission, the Metropolitan Park Commission in 1907, on which Whitnall would sit on. No original copies of the report appear to exist, though it is possibly the Whitnall gave this as a speech in November 1906 in front of the SAF, where it was titled “Park Utility.”²⁰⁵

While delving into planning, he also took a more active role in the SDP and later on in life used the connections he made to garner support for his ideas. He ran for City Treasurer several times in his life, but he won his first and only victory in 1910 by over 7,000 votes.²⁰⁶ In the *1912 Municipal Campaign Booklet*, it described Whitnall as “a man of the greatest value to the administration in all its constructive work for the city.”²⁰⁷ The Socialist newspaper, the *Milwaukee Leader*, ran by Berger and Heath, lauded many of the changes that Whitnall made to the treasurer’s office. His first order was to change the way payroll was handed out. Instead of asking for city employees to spend their workdays, which could waste up to four hours of their day, coming into City Hall to pick up their paychecks, he established a city

²⁰⁵ American Florists Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 27 Number 963 17 November 1906 (Chicago: American Florists Company, 1906).

²⁰⁶ “Votes by Wards for Treasurer,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 6 April 1910.

²⁰⁷ Socialist Party of Wisconsin, *Milwaukee municipal campaign book 1912, Social-democratic party*, (Milwaukee: The Co-operative Printery, 1912), 21

paymaster to go out to them, saving the city a suggested \$6,000.²⁰⁸ He began to survey and update the neglected tax certificates on some of the larger property in the city. The total revenue he suggested that could be saved was \$37,000. His crowning achievement and the one which caused him a large headache, was the improvement on the city's tax collection.²⁰⁹

Before 1911, all of Milwaukee's taxes were collected on or before February 1 for the year. Yet, according to Whitnall, most of these sums were not needed until August 1. Many of Milwaukee's citizens could not afford to pay their taxes by February and were then forced to contact 'tax sharks,' who would pay their tax, but then charge fifteen percent interest until the loan is repaid. Whitnall suggested and put into operation that the city would extend the time for paying taxes for a period of six months, and then it would only charge six percent interest on the loan, thus cutting out the tax shark, saving money for the citizen, and creating more revenue for the city.²¹⁰

This led to a large political fight in city hall. On December 7, 1911 Whitnall, City Clerk Carl D. Thompson, and Mayor Seidel were served summons to appear in court to defend the law against 'tax shark' Sydney J. Knox.²¹¹ Knox claimed the law was unconstitutional and would in fact lose money for the city. Whitnall defended the law declaring, "The people's interests are best sub-served by the new law enacted by the last legislature which we are endeavoring to carry . . . in spirit in which it was enacted. It is

²⁰⁸ Socialist Party of Wisconsin, 69

²⁰⁹ Socialist Party of Wisconsin, 71.

²¹⁰ Socialist Party of Wisconsin, 70.

²¹¹ "Tax Sharks in Suit hit at Whitnall Plan," *Milwaukee Leader*, 7 December 1911.

entirely equitable, it imposes no obligation on anyone, it is profitable to the city, but . . . the profit of tax sharks is obvious.”²¹²

The worst public outcry seems to have come from the standoff between the Socialist controlled Treasury Department and Frank B. Schutz, the Democratic Tax Commissioner.²¹³ Schutz, who was also the Chairman of the Democratic Central Commission and a ‘Rose’ man, was in charge of the Assessor’s Office, whose job it was to assess the citizen’s property for taxes²¹⁴ Whitnall’s Office was in charge of collecting those taxes. In what the *Leader* charged as partisan politics, Schulz not only raised taxes on the poor and lowered them on the rich, but had also incorrectly assessed over \$30,000,000 of property that had been added to the tax roll through annexation.²¹⁵ The property that the Socialists chose to use as their rallying cry for this unfair tax was the Hamburger Estate which City Attorney Hoan claimed he had legal evidence that Nathan Hamburger had owed \$650,000 during 1908, 1909, and 1910 but had not paid anything in taxes.²¹⁶ The *Milwaukee Leader* attacked back:

The tax rate, in fact, is lower this year than it was last year, but because of an unjust assessment the taxes of many property owners have been raised and the taxes of other property owners lowered. And the Socialists did not make the assessment – that is the crowning glory, the dying effort of the Rose Democracy.²¹⁷

²¹² “Tax Shark in Suit hit at Whitnall Plan.”

²¹³ “Crowd surge to city treasurer to get tax bills, demanding reasons for increase put up to Schutz,” *Milwaukee Leader*, 13 December 1911.

²¹⁴ “Schulz is Hopeful,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 1 December 1911.

²¹⁵ “Truth about Taxes,” *Milwaukee Leader*, 18 December 1911.

²¹⁶ “Schulz Quits under Fire,” *Milwaukee Leader*, 27 December 1911.

²¹⁷ “Truth About Taxes.”

Under the scrutiny and an inquisition by City Attorney Hoan, Schulz left his job early.²¹⁸

The city's largest newspapers, the *Milwaukee Journal* and *Milwaukee Sentinel* lined up against the Socialists. In the run up to the April 1912 election, Whitnall said to the *Milwaukee Leader*:

No, I never have been afraid of the results of this campaign. I saw plainly last fall that the lack of understanding was the reason that misrepresentation by our opponents had its effect . . . Whether our strength of purpose could overcome the combined selfish interest who will not and dare not understand us . . . But the result of the last primary has convinced me that we have evolved from a plurality to a majority party which will be demonstrated in tomorrow's vote.²¹⁹

He lost his reelection for the Nonpartisan candidate, J.P. Carney, 43,519 to 29,987.²²⁰

Although he was already in his fifties, Whitnall used this defeat to start yet another new venture in his life, one he had "nurtured for years," The Commonwealth Mutual Savings Bank.²²¹ It would "differ from National, States, or other privately owned banks, in that it has no special capital owned by a few, but its capital is the deposited money."²²² In a 1922 article by Daniel W. Hoan, Whitnall was given all the credit for the idea, going so far as to deny being paid for his services as manager for the first years.²²³ The bank was quickly chartered after the Socialists defeat, and was officially announced in

²¹⁸ "Schulz Quite under Fire," *Milwaukee Leader*, 27 December 1911.

²¹⁹ "What Leaders Say," *Milwaukee Leader*, 2 April 1912.

²²⁰ "Results," *Milwaukee Leader*, 3 April 1912.

²²¹ "Undated Whitnall Biography" University of Wisconsin – Madison Archives, 5.

²²² "Cooperative Banking" Ad, *Milwaukee Leader*, 24 June 1912.

²²³ Daniel W. Hoan, "Milwaukee: One city where cooperative banks, stores, shops and housing have been begun," *Labor Age Volume 11* (1922), 12.

both the *Milwaukee Journal* and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* on May 31st, 1912.²²⁴ When interviewed, Whitnall claimed the bank “was not a party affair,”²²⁵ but many of the names of the fifty incorporators (Richard Elsner, Carl P. Dietz, Frederic Heath, Carl D. Thompson, Paul Gauer, Daniel Hoan, and of course Whitnall) were all well known socialists.²²⁶ The bank was for “the savings of laborers, mechanics, farmers, servants, minors, and others; and to loan such funds for and all depositors.”²²⁷ It was “a bank designed to benefit the wage-earner, whether he be a depositor or borrower.”²²⁸ The bank began with no capital and would maintain an office at 419 East Water Street.²²⁹ Hoan described the offices: “After the granting of the charter, a little room was rented in the downtown district on the second floor of an old structure which looked more like that office of a country doctor than a bank.”²³⁰

Around the middle of June, the bank elected its first officers with Judge Richard Elsner becoming the first president, Emil Broddie, first vice-president, Henry Campbell, Sr., second vice-president, and C.B. Whitnall secretary-treasurer.²³¹ Originally, one only needed to deposit 25 cents to start a bank account.²³² The bank opened on July 1, 1912 and business was reported as “brisk.”²³³ On its first day of operation is gained a total savings deposits of

²²⁴ “Socialists have Bank,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May 1912.

²²⁵ “Socialists Have Bank.”

²²⁶ Articles of Incorporation, “Commonwealth Savings Bank,” Milwaukee County Historical Society.

²²⁷ Articles of Incorporation.

²²⁸ “Undated Whitnall Biography”, 5.

²²⁹ “Socialists Plan New Savings Bank,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 31 May 1912.

²³⁰ Hoan, “Milwaukee: One city where cooperative banks, stores, shops and housing have been begun,” 12.

²³¹ “Judge Elsner heads new Socialist Bank,” *Milwaukee Leader*, 18 June 1912.

²³² “Commonwealth Mutual Savings Bank” Ad, *Milwaukee Leader*, 20 June 1912.

²³³ “Bank opens with Brisk Business,” *Milwaukee Leader*, 2 July 1912.

\$960.25.²³⁴ After ten years, the bank had deposits of \$600,000 with money being loaned for buying homes and any surplus moneys invested in municipal bonds.²³⁵ Whitnall remained on the board of directors as the secretary-treasurer the rest of his life.²³⁶ The business remained a cooperative venture until 1983, when it changed its name to Commonwealth Bank of Milwaukee. After numerous reorganizations acquisitions, in 2012 the bank was purchased by U.S. Bank National Association.²³⁷

In 1902 Whitnall began living separately from wife Annie, and in 1910 began divorce proceedings grounds of “voluntary separation for five years.”²³⁸ Annie had moved to Los Angeles by that time, and had Meta Berger, wife of Victor Berger, act as her witness during the proceedings.²³⁹ The divorce appears to be friendly, as both had separated their holdings years before, and their only child, G. Gordon Whitnall was already an adult and also living in California at the time.²⁴⁰ The final divorce judgment came down February 1912. In June of the same year, Whitnall married Ms. Marie Kottnauer of Milwaukee and they would remain married until his death.²⁴¹

Gordon Whitnall, like his father, began to learn the florist trade in 1908 with the firm Hunkel & Holton.²⁴² And, like his father, Whitnall would change

²³⁴ “Bank opens with Brisk Business.”

²³⁵ Hoan, “Milwaukee: One city where cooperative banks, stores, shops and housing have been begun,” 12.

²³⁶ Gurda, 268.

²³⁷ <http://www.fdic.gov/>, “Commonwealth Savings Bank,” accessed October 13, 2012.

²³⁸ “Whitnall v. Whitnall” Milwaukee County Divorce Proceedings, Milwaukee County Historical Society

²³⁹ “Whitnall v. Whitnall.”

²⁴⁰ “Whitnall v. Whitnall.”

²⁴¹ American Florist Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 38 Number 1258, July 13 1912, (Chicago: American Florist Company, 1912).

²⁴² American Florist Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 31, Number 1061, Oct 3 1908, (Chicago: American Florist Company, 1908).

paths and begin to focus just on planning. He would follow his grandparents and mother and begin living in Los Angeles in 1910, where he would become a well-known planner.²⁴³ In 1913 he founded the Los Angeles City Planning Association and in 1920 he began the Los Angeles City Planning Department, and acted as its director until 1930.²⁴⁴ He married three times, and his third wife, Brysis Whitnall, was also a planner in Los Angeles. Asked about where his interest in city planning claim from, Gordon replied: “For years I had breathed, lived, and eaten planning while with my father. It was the natural thing to do.”²⁴⁵

C.B. Whitnall began his public service life in the Metropolitan Park Commission, but he would sit on numerous Commissions throughout the rest of his life. He was a founding member of the Country Park Commission, the Metropolitan Park Commission, the Board of Public Land Commission, the Harbor Commission, and several Housing Commissions. His work with these commissions would come together to change the layout of the city and county of Milwaukee.

Whitnall worked well into his eighties, and did not retire from his many boards until the late 1940s. He continued to live on Whitnall Knoll at the Dousman street home, until his death of heart failure on January 5th, 1949, just days before his 90th birthday. His wife, Marie, passed a few months later in 1950. Charles Whitnall spent the majority of his life working towards the parks, parkways, and decentralization that is still seen in the city of

²⁴³ McCarthy, 23.

²⁴⁴ “Guide to the Gordon and Brysis Whitnall Papers, 1913-1975.”

²⁴⁵ “Park Pioneer Sees Greater Milwaukee as a Garden City,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 21 January 1940.

Milwaukee. After his death, his ashes were spread in his favorite grove of trees in Whitnall Park.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ "Winter in Whitnall Park," <http://www.milwaukeehistory.net>, accessed October 31, 2012

CHAPTER THREE:

Charles Whitnall and the beginning of Milwaukee Planning

Over his lifetime, C.B. Whitnall provided several anecdotes of when and how his passion for planning began. In a 1910 article chronicling the Socialist victories in Milwaukee, Whitnall claimed his interest began when an artist visited the Whitnall Knoll. The artist had commented on a painting of a log cabin set in the wilderness, claiming: “The picture is all wrong. The grass ought to be cropped off like stubby beard, and there ought to be little bunchy beds of flowers cut in here and there.” When Whitnall asked why, the artist replied: “Well that’s the way your yard isn’t it? I don’t see why you should like such a picture as this with a yard like that.”²⁴⁷ Much later, in the *Milwaukee Journal*, Whitnall claimed inspiration came from lectures given by a University of Wisconsin professor.

“Before and after the lectures we discussed city and county problems. One night someone remarks that it was a pity cities leveled off hills and filled in valleys and later developed artificial parks on the same land. Some of us...decided to do something about it. We had a bill passed in the legislature authorizing creation of a county park board. We then went to work.”²⁴⁸

Whitnall spoke several times on the importance of managing and planning city parks before he joined an official city board in 1906. This first board provided a spring pad for two different idea, the Civic Center and parkways that Whitnall would advocate for several decades after their first

²⁴⁷ Dorothy Dale, “Socialist Officials, Making Good in Milwaukee, They Are planning a city of garden homes,” *Logansport Daily Reporter*, 22 July 1910.

²⁴⁸ “Million People will live in natural, open spaces, as beauty spot grows and spreads along rivers, says Charles B. Whitnall, Painting a Word Picture of the future,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 21 January 1940.

introduction. After joining the Metropolitan Park Commission, Whitnall would also be voted onto a Board of Public Land Commissioners twice.

After the election of Daniel Hoan to the mayor's office, Whitnall found new compatriots to advocate for how he thought Milwaukee should develop. Ideas that he had suggested under Seidel and then Bading, would come fruition like that of the Civic Center, Garden Homes, zoning, and an ambitious annexation program to stop a crowded Milwaukee.

Along with sitting on the influential Board of Public Land Commissioners in Milwaukee, Whitnall would also hold an important spot on the Milwaukee County Parks Commission, which became the de facto planning body in Milwaukee County when it was created. Pairing these two positions, Whitnall was able to push for a decentralized city which was helped along by a consolidated parks and parkway system.

Whitnall was not a trained planner, which was not unusual for the era. City planning as a dedicated profession had begun only a few years before Whitnall officially joined any official planning bodies. Instead his focus came from his lifelong interest in the preservation of the natural environment and the importance of it in Americans daily lives. As early as 1898, at the 14th Annual SAF Convention, Whitnall began to think about the management of parks. When the topic of florists working with local park systems, he said:

Moreover I think we should interest ourselves and the public as far as possible in the management and care of public parks; and I believe it would be advisable, where it can be done in our cities, for the local florists clubs to branch out and form horticultural societies for the purpose of inducing people outside the florist profession to take an interest in the parks, their evolution, in

order to park up and hold on to good superintendents and good managers when they get them. I think by creating a support in that way this political influence will be overcome more effectually than in any other way.²⁴⁹

By the end of his career, Whitnall would come to be known as a “good supervisor” and would use his political influence to become the celebrated “father of the Milwaukee County Park System.”

In his 1903 speech at the 19th Annual SAF Convention in Milwaukee, Whitnall began to articulate the driving focus for his vision of Milwaukee’s open, green spaces: the idea of natural country versus the manufactured aesthetic of a landscape which was popularized by Frederick Law Olmsted. Whitnall declared: “Did it ever occur to you that paths are always beautiful while walks laid out by single individual seldom are? Sometimes a manufactured walk becomes a path – an occurrence too rare.”²⁵⁰ Though, at the time of this early speech, he offered no explicit rules, he did sum up his process, “The words Always, Never, and Can’t you need not use but the word Feel or Feelings represent the mainspring of your success.”²⁵¹

Whitnall broadened his scope of the speech and created a self-published report on “parking” Milwaukee in 1906.²⁵² For him, parking a city related to both the acquisition and development of parks and parkways throughout the

²⁴⁹ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society, 1898*, Volume 14, (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, 1898), 70.

²⁵⁰ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society, 1903*, Volume 19, (Boston: Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, 1903), 53.

²⁵¹ Society of American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Society, 1903*, 65.

²⁵² (Again, no originals of the 1906 report appear to exist. Author is working off of a reprint from 1936 from the Milwaukee County Historical Society).

Milwaukee area. And the 1906 report presented several cases and criticisms for his beliefs. Designs and outdoor art were not needed for parks and parkways, only trees and shrubberies. As Whitnall stated “parking is really city forestry.”²⁵³ He did not see the current park system as preserving the green areas in a city as much as creating them, and doing that poorly. And he saw it as the municipal government’s job to become the leaders in the park planning movement:

The waste of natural resources and destruction of natural environs is a public tragedy if not a public crime. If our city and country government cannot conserve for all the very basis of their lives; if they cannot prevent the few from undermining the edifice in which the multitude must live “why government at all?”²⁵⁴

The first section of the report was largely botanical, which is not surprising, considering Whitnall’s career as a florist. Green plants were needed, Whitnall argued, to absorb the poisonous carbon gas and create ‘pure oxygen’. Vegetation was needed “for many people to live close together where they inhale the air that has not been purified by foliage; and if the purifying does not take place close by, there should be an opportunity for the atmosphere to travel without creating those ‘pneumonia drafts’ so common in between buildings and so rare in the woods.”²⁵⁵ Parking a city was necessary for good health among its citizens. His report touched on water conservation, sewage management, and deforestation. “The Soil of the Future must be

²⁵³ “Untitled Report from 1936,” Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2.

²⁵⁴ “Untitled Report from 1936,” 8.

²⁵⁵ “Untitled Report from 1936,” 2.

planned in the present,” Whitnall stated, “to waste is a crime for which all mankind must suffer.”²⁵⁶

Drawing on earlier ideas, the report was a criticism of what he perceived as ‘Olmstedian principles’ that guided the Milwaukee City Park Board.

“We notice by a recent report that . . . claim[s] we have plenty of parks now and cannot afford to maintain more...much of the expense in maintenance at present is a waste; also that it quite frequently happens that out most expensive parks do us the least good.”²⁵⁷

Whitnall found the manufacturing of these natural vistas to be careless and he again brought up the natural walkway that first appeared in his 1903 speech.

Why are paths beautiful and walks tiresome and, for the most part, useless? Have you noticed how people traveling keep to a path with no apparent thought of, or inclination for, abandoning it; whereas all people ignore all signs, notices, or commands to keep on a fashionable path?

If your grocer continually runs over your lawn, not appreciating your cement walk, arranged in “artistic curves” at considerable expense, you are apt to resent it. Do you know why? Because your walk is a failure. The boy is natural, your walk is only fashionable.”²⁵⁸

Parks to Whitnall were not about a ‘luxury’ for the working people, but utility; they should be so ubiquitous that they could be used for daily travel and relaxation.

Whitnall’s insistence on the importance of the parks was hardly groundbreaking. Milwaukee had integrated green spaces into its plan since it was first platted in 1835.²⁵⁹ Small green squares were donated by the three

²⁵⁶ “Untitled Report from 1936,” 4.

²⁵⁷ “Untitled Report from 1936,” 5.

²⁵⁸ “Untitled Report from 1936,” 6.

²⁵⁹ Robert Wells, “History of Milwaukee County Park Commission,” Milwaukee County Parks System Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society

founders of the city, Kilbourn and Juneau, in 1835 and George H. Walker in 1837.²⁶⁰ Later German immigrants introduced Beer Gardens; these were both meeting places for clubs and families, and areas for relaxation on Sundays during the summer months. These were smaller, outdoor gardens, for families and friends to use for music and games and of course, to drink beer, yet were private institutions.²⁶¹

In the late 1800s, Milwaukee looked to establish a city body to oversee a new park system. In 1889, after enabling state legislation, Mayor Thomas H. Brown established and appointed the first City of Milwaukee Park Commission and five businessmen were selected. Christian Wahl voted as president.²⁶² In 1892 the Commission approached famous landscape designer, Frederick Law Olmsted of Central Park fame, who was in the Midwest to layout the grounds World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago.²⁶³ The Park Board had bought five tracts of land before coming to Olmsted and offered him \$12.50 for every acre he provided park drawings and designs.²⁶⁴ Olmsted took the job, but not without finding fault in the location of the tracts of land purchased by the Board as he felt that they were too far from the center of the city.²⁶⁵ Of the three parks he designed, Lake, River and West – it is Lake Park that is thought to be the most “Olmstedian” and to this day retains much of the original

²⁶⁰ Robert Wells, “History of Milwaukee County Park Commission.”

²⁶¹ Platt, 773.

²⁶² Diane M. Buck, “Olmsted's Lake Park,” in *Milwaukee Stories*, ed. Thomas J. Jablonsky (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2005), 184-185.

²⁶³ Buck, “Olmsted's Lake Park,” *Milwaukee Stories*, 184-185.

²⁶⁴ Buck, “Olmsted's Lake Park,” *Milwaukee Stories*, 185.

²⁶⁵ Buck, “Olmsted's Lake Park,” *Milwaukee Stories*, 185.

design.²⁶⁶ While the city's Park Board was very happy with Olmsted's designs, Charles B. Whitnall was not. Although he was offered a place on the Board, he rejected the position.²⁶⁷ Instead his work led him in the development of another Commission, one that would ultimately become the main city planning body of Milwaukee.

In early 1906 a new "Park Improvement Commission" had been introduced to the Common Council, but had been indefinitely postponed.²⁶⁸ In late 1906 the measure was reintroduced under the name "Metropolitan Park Commission" and came to a vote in April 1907. It was enacted under the parameters to "systematically procure information as to all facts bearing upon the needs of present and future of the city in regard to parks, playgrounds and boulevard."²⁶⁹ The measure was adopted, and the commission was established for three years. It would consist of eleven members: one to be a member of the Common Council, the City Engineer, and eight citizens not holding official positions.²⁷⁰ In July 1907, Whitnall was appointed, probably because of the 1906 Report. Alfred C. Clas, prominent Milwaukee architect, a member of the national American Civic Association, an active advocate for city planning, was voted president.²⁷¹

The Metropolitan Park Commission quickly expanded from its original scope. Tasked with creating a system of parks, boulevards and driveways, it

²⁶⁶ <http://lakeparkfriends.org/history.shtml>, 13 October 2012

²⁶⁷ "Undated Whitnall Biography," 2.

²⁶⁸ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division "Preliminary Reports of the city planning commission of the city of Milwaukee" (Milwaukee: The Division, 1911), 4.

²⁶⁹ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1907-1908*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1908), 1553.

²⁷⁰ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 4-5.

²⁷¹ McCarthy, 8.

“became evident to the members of the commission that the problem upon which it was engaged could not be properly solved without taking into account a great many correlated problems.”²⁷² The Commission began to branch out from park improvement and design to embrace other aspects of city planning.

In 1909 the Commission began to address the state of Milwaukee’s layout in order to introduce the Common Council and the public to the importance of ‘scientific planning.’ “The First Tentative Report of the Metropolitan Park Commission” was released on January 28th 1909.²⁷³ They defined their work as a “commission for conservation of health and physical welfare because that is the object of park;” and continued to criticize the Milwaukee parks for being “but an island” instead of all-encompassing reform.²⁷⁴ One manner of fixing the welfare of the inhabitants of the city, they suggested, was to create a system of ‘parked ways.’ “Health and its consequential energy and beauty is not a condition you can go to a park for once a week in the summer and carry enough home to make you happy for the entire year.”²⁷⁵ These parked ways would enlarge the streets to 130 to 150 feet across, and could “be elongated parks, particularly where there are springs, brook, or creeks or a ‘lookout hill’.”²⁷⁶

Tucked amidst these new transportation plans, was another, even larger, idea – one for a “Civic Center” at the middle of the new parked plans. The proposed parked ways would allow easy access from all parts of the city or

²⁷² Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 5.

²⁷³ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 7.

²⁷⁴ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 7-8.

²⁷⁵ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 13.

²⁷⁶ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 11-12.

county – and would lead to the city and county’s administrative buildings all grouped together, a City Beautiful idea. This was also a jumping off point for Whitnall’s regional city.²⁷⁷ The plan was laid out a the civic center extending “from the City Hall to Ninth Street, which encompasses four of our civic institutions from the outset, viz., City Hall, Auditorium, Library, and Museum, it being the plan to place all others there eventually, as rebuilding becomes necessary.”²⁷⁸ That particular area was chosen for they considered it to be a blighted area that needed to be torn down and rebuilt from the ground. The plan was inspired by several European cities like Berlin and Hamburg and American cities like Boston and Washington D.C.²⁷⁹ In July 1909, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and John Nolen provided their “Experts’ Report on Civic Center” which praised the project and “notably its proximity to the business center combined with the economy of purchase, a visual relationship to the City Hall, and an arrangement of grades favorable to a fine artistic composition.”²⁸⁰ They had a few criticisms, most of which settled on the proposed site of the County Building, which needed to be more clearly studied in terms of differences in level and provisions for a possible enlargement.²⁸¹ This first report would define much of Whitnall’s work for the next four decades.

²⁷⁷ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division 11.

²⁷⁸ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division 14.

²⁷⁹ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division 14.

²⁸⁰ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division 19.

²⁸¹ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 20.

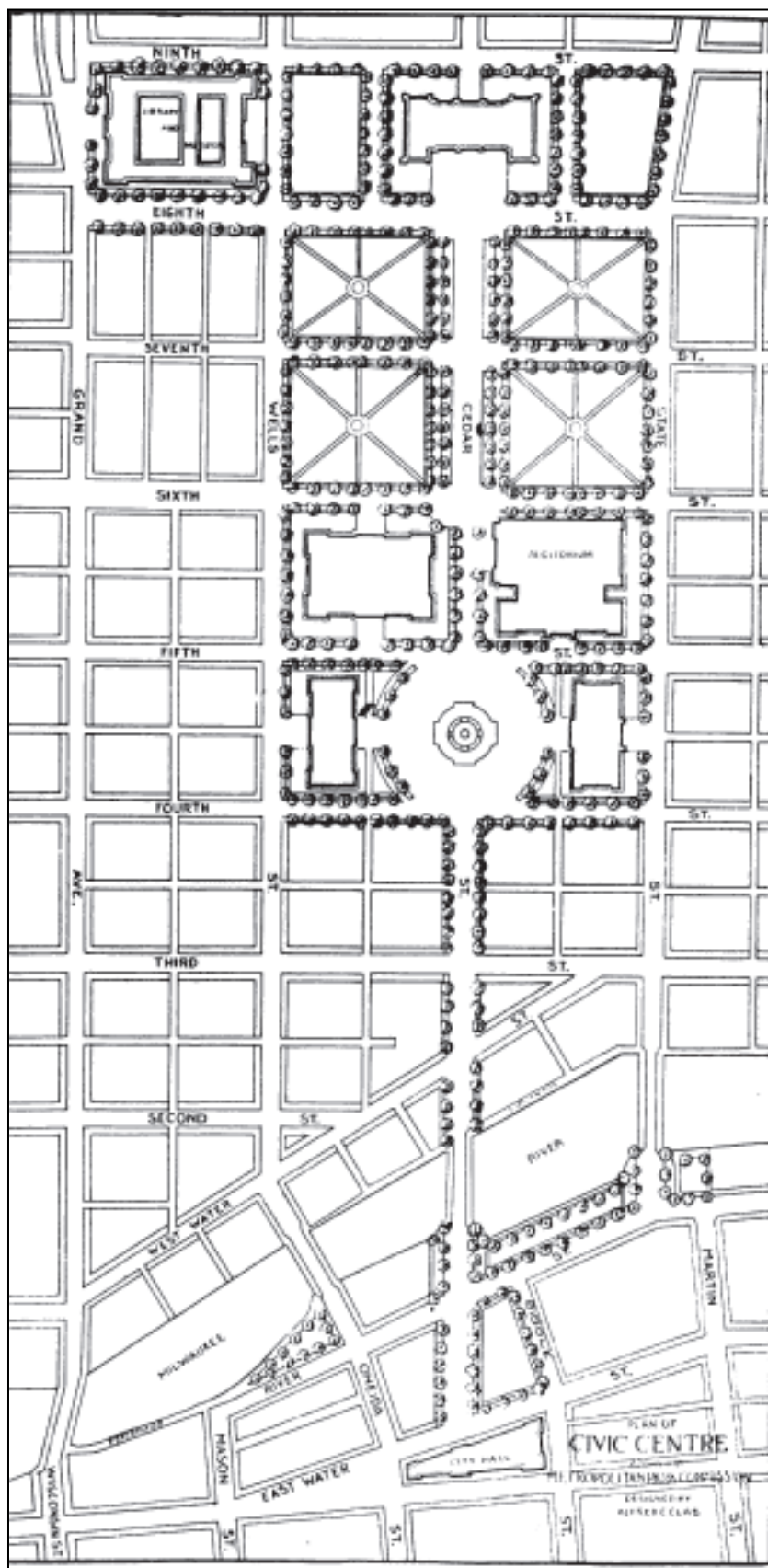


Figure 12: 1909 Civic Center Plan, from *Preliminary Reports of the City Planning Commission of Milwaukee, 1911*, from books.google.com

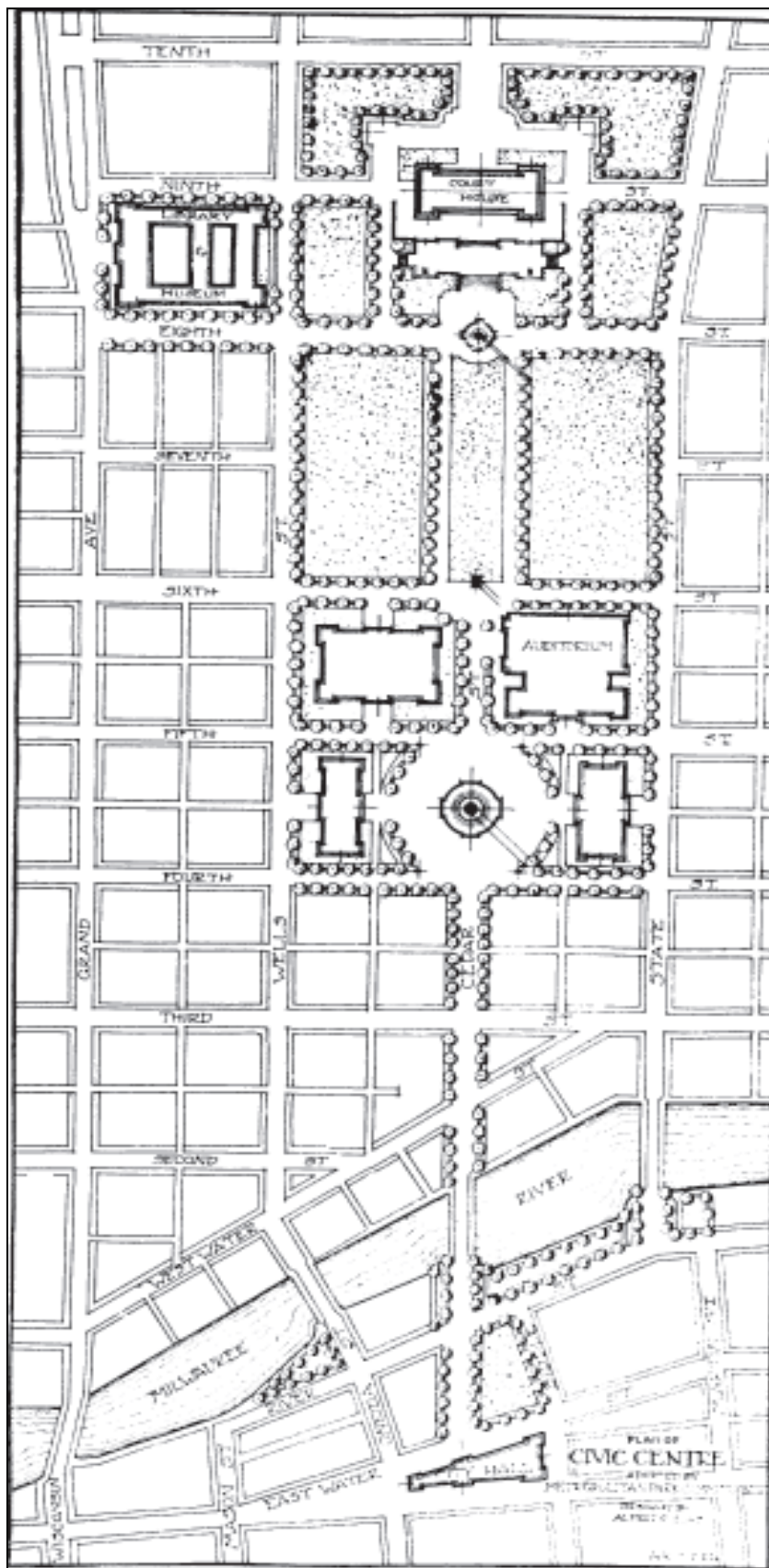


Figure 13: Civic Center Plan, modified by Experts, from *Preliminary Reports of the City Planning Commission of Milwaukee, 1911*, from books.google.com

The Commission released several ‘tentative’ reports over the next year and all were a piece within the plan of the larger Civic Center. In November 1909 “The Second Tentative Report of the Metropolitan Park Commission” was released on the building of ‘Neighborhood Centers.’ While these spaces would have park components, including playgrounds and grounds for playing ball and ice skating, they would also have a library, reading room, facilities for bathing, game rooms, an auditorium, and a lunch room.”²⁸² The Commission suggested that ten acres for one would be the best, though each center although less would do. These Centers were imagined as a place for both young and old to come together to both learn and enjoy nature. In fact, they sound quite a bit like a Turner Hall within the neighborhoods.

These Neighborhood Centers were not a new idea. One had already been built by the Milwaukee School Board as a combination of both a park and public school. The first was established on the lower North Side’s Sixth District School in 1908.²⁸³ It was considered a success at bringing together not only the young and old, but also different ethnic groups in the area. By 1912, the Public School Board had established a Division of Municipal and Adult Recreation and by the middle of the decade there were eleven social centers established in both poor and middle-class areas of the city. Whitnall knew firsthand about the centers because Annie Gordon Whitnall had been a part of the School Board since 1907.²⁸⁴

²⁸² Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division 30.

²⁸³ Elizabeth Jozwiak, “Politics in Play: Socialism, Free Speech, and Social Centers in Milwaukee,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Volume 86, Number 3 (Spring 2003), 13.

²⁸⁴ Jozwiak, 17.

The Third and Fourth “Tentative Reports” were recommendations on the layout of the proposed parked ways and the conservation of land around the three rivers of Milwaukee that led into Lake Michigan: The Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic Rivers. “All features of parking specified in previous reports apply to this system of river parks as well,” the report explained, “They will fulfill the functions of small parks for many and various localities, at the same time providing delightful drives and walks miles in extent.”²⁸⁵ In the Fourth Report, included how these parked ways would be laid out and where new Neighborhood Centers would be located. The final report included a large map that depicted all that the Commission planned for the downtown.

The overwhelming victories of the Socialist Party in the 1910 elections turned national spotlight onto the new municipal leaders like Whitnall and Mayor Seidel. Reporters and reformers like Ida Tarbell flocked to Milwaukee to cover the story.²⁸⁶ They took the opportunity to tout the plans for the new “Garden City” of Milwaukee. In July of 1910, Dorothy Dale, an investigative journalist and a non-Socialist, was sent to Milwaukee to write a three-piece syndicated feature on “what those socialists city officials are doing; what kind of rulers they are.”²⁸⁷ In her second piece, “Socialists Rule in Milwaukee – Mayor Seidel and the Men Who Help Govern This City,” Dale introduced City Treasurer Whitnall as: “The author of the parkways system favored by

²⁸⁵ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division 35-36.

²⁸⁶ Berger, 42

²⁸⁷ Dorothy Dale, “The Rule of Socialists In Milwaukee and what they are doing,” *The Des Moines News*, 12 July 1910.

Milwaukee Socialists . . . He is called the Ruskin of the Milwaukee branch because of his stand for the beautiful as that which makes for the most good.”²⁸⁸ In her third piece, “Socialist Officials Making Good in Milwaukee; They’re Planning a City of Garden Homes,” focused entirely on Whitnall’s planning policies, which would not only lead to cheaper homes for the working people, but also be populated with trees and flowers. Although Whitnall had advocated the incorporation of larger green spaces in urban areas, this is the first time “Garden City” was used to describe Whitnall’s plans, the term obviously derived from the ideas of English planner, Ebenezer Howard. “The workers of our city are its most valuable asset!” Seidel was quoted, while Whitnall explained “You know we Socialists believe a city should be planned for the well-being of its people.”²⁸⁹ Another 1910 piece, this one by Raymond Evans, promoted Whitnall’s parkways plan. Evans called it “the New American city come true.”²⁹⁰ Both articles heavily featured the idea of the new Civic Center bounded by beautiful, tree-lined, parkways.²⁹¹

Under the new Socialist leadership, planning was further supported by City Hall. In 1910, the City Council extended the Metropolitan Park Commission’s timeline by two years and later gave it a further power over many aspects of city planning.²⁹² In 1911, the name was officially changed

²⁸⁸ Dorothy Dale, “Socialists Rule in Milwaukee – Mayor Seidel and The Men Who Help Govern This City,” *Fort Wayne Daily News*, 16 July 1910.

²⁸⁹ Dale, “Socialist Officials, Making Good in Milwaukee, They Are planning a city of garden homes.”
²⁹⁰

²⁹¹ Raymond Evans, “City Will Spend a Lifetime and Millions for More Outdoors,” *Logansport Daily Reporter*, 22 September 1910

²⁹² Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, City Planning Division, 5.

from Metropolitan Park Commission to the City Planning Commission.²⁹³ About the same time, another board was introduced. Due to a new state law passed in June 1911, a new Board of Public Land Commissioners was suggested for “the purpose of converting streets and highways designated by the Common Council of such city into parkways or boulevards.”²⁹⁴ The ordinance passed in December 1911, and Whitnall was appointed to the board with a term expiring in 1917²⁹⁵ and was later appointed their first secretary.²⁹⁶ Their first suggested project was the widening of Vliet Street from Fortieth street west into the suburb of Wauwatosa, which was slowed due to the Common Council not granting the Board the full \$25,000 authorized by the law.²⁹⁷

Yet, even with the Mayor’s support and with Whitnall’s twin positions and zeal, most scholars agree that city planning in Milwaukee was neither organized nor popular.²⁹⁸ Before the Seidel administration, the authorization for Metropolitan Park Commission had nearly been repealed several times. Mayor Rose believed the appointed member lacked any qualifications and wrote to the Common Council: “It seems to me that it is entirely inconsistent with the purposes for which the board was created to appoint those to be its

²⁹³ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1911-1912*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1912), 877.

²⁹⁴ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1911-1912*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1912), 803.

²⁹⁵ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1911-1912*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1912), 1241.

²⁹⁶ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1911-1912*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1912), 1367.

²⁹⁷ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1912-1913*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1913), 1136-1137.

²⁹⁸ Robert C. Reinders, “Early Career of Daniel Hoan: A Study of Socialism in the Progressivism Era,” (M.A. Thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1948), 127.

members who are not qualified by experience or education.”²⁹⁹ By contrast, Whitnall believed that it fell to him to both educate and advocate Milwaukee’s citizens about the importance of planning. In 1911, he self-published “Milwaukee City Planning” in which he defined city planning as “Public Hygiene and Political Sanitation which in turn involves Economic Equity in the conservation of Humanity. That means there shall be no waste if we are to be healthy. The alternative is immorality and pestilence.” The book echoed many of the same points from his earlier works, but here Whitnall also argued for the economy of planning. Downtown Milwaukee needed to be restructured for it was congested and cluttered. A Civic Center needed to be built, slums needed to be cleared, and while these actions were expensive, the money needed to be spent in order to structure Milwaukee for the future. Extra taxes could be levied and then be reduced later. At this time, he also advocated for the creation of zoning laws and the development of municipal housing, like that in Germany and Switzerland, which he called “Garden Homes.”³⁰⁰

Seidel, Whitnall, and most other Socialists lost their reelections in 1912. After their defeat by the Nonpartisan opposition, many of the Socialists who had received places within City Hall were removed.³⁰¹ Under Seidel the Metropolitan Park Commission had been expanded but, in May of 1912, the First Assistant City Attorney Timlin claimed that the City Planning Commission was illegal because it was created by a resolution instead of

²⁹⁹ 1909 Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1908-1909*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1909), 495.

³⁰⁰ C.B. Whitnall, *Milwaukee City Planning*, 19.

³⁰¹ “Last Socialist Out,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 29 June 1912.

ordinance. It appears to have ended during the final months of 1912, after five years of activity.³⁰² Whitnall found no comrade in the new mayor, Bading, who had campaigned on “small parks and breathing centers.”³⁰³

The Board of Public Land Commissioners did remain and continued to make improvements to the street ways by having the Common Council condemn areas and then widening those streets. In 1913 their powers were expanded by State Law and Milwaukee ordinance which allowed cities to ‘segregate’ residential and commercial areas.³⁰⁴ Under this new law, the Board was also commanded to create a comprehensive plan for new city residential areas and the adjacent territories, an early attempt at zoning.³⁰⁵ Yet, before they were able to start these new larger plans, Bading and the Common Council interfered.

By 1914, though, friction had developed between the Common Council and the Board of Land Commissioners. Whitnall had reproached the Council in the Board’s annual review, claiming there were no “expenditures” or plans undertaken, for the year and that their only “transactions” for the year were an attempt “to understand the will of your Honorable Body in the execution of such work as naturally came within the province of this commission for your assistance.”³⁰⁶ Originally, at the beginning of the year, the board had been given the duty to create a comprehensive plan, but the Council had objected to

³⁰² “City Planning Body Held to be Illegal,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 24 May 1912.

³⁰³ “Bading’s Acceptance Speech,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 April 1912.

³⁰⁴ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1914-1915*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1915), Proceedings of Common Council, 9.

³⁰⁵ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1914-1915*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1915), Proceedings of Common Council, 46.

³⁰⁶ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1914-1915*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1915), Proceedings of Common Council, 1033.

Secretary Whitnall heading the operation. The Council had asked for the task to be undertaken by someone not appointed to the Board. After the matter was settled, and an outside party had been appointed to the job, the Common Council abruptly moved to abolish the Board.³⁰⁷ Whitnall finished the 1914 annual report angrily: “Therefore, gentlemen, owing to what appears to be contradictory moves and instructions on your part, we have been unable as yet to accomplish anything; we are ready, however, to renew our efforts at your command, when understood.”³⁰⁸

It is unclear why the Common Council and Bading moved to abolish the Board after a year after the new powers were granted. The Common Council could have wished to create a new Board and maybe felt that instead of amending the 1911 ordinance which created the Board, they would just start from scratch. Or the Common Council could have wanted could have been to change the make-up of the Board, which was adjusted to just five members to be the Commissioner of Public Works, the City Engineer and three citizens.³⁰⁹

No matter the reason, the Board of Public Land Commissioners was officially abolished five days after submitting their 1914 annual review on January 18th, 1915.³¹⁰ Just six months later a new Board of Public Land Commissioners (hereafter referred to as BPLC) was brought in front of the Common Council. The new Board passed in September of 1915 and

³⁰⁷ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1914-1915*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1915), Proceedings of Common Council, 1033.

³⁰⁸ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1914-1915*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1915), Proceedings of Common Council, 1034.

³⁰⁹ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1915-1916*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1916), 299.

³¹⁰ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1914-1915*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1915), Proceedings of Common Council, 1027.

commissioners were named: August Richter Jr., previous president of the Board was reappointed while Whitnall was not.³¹¹

That was about to change. With the election of a new Socialist mayor, the Board, and Whitnall himself, would find an ally in the Council Chambers again. In 1916, after first being elected City Attorney in 1910, and being the only major Socialist to keep his seat in the 1912 and 1914 elections, Daniel Webster Hoan was ready to run for Mayor. He would become the most successful Socialist Mayor in the history of the United States.

Daniel Webster Hoan was born in Waukesha, Wisconsin on March 12 1881.³¹² His mother, Margaret A. Hood, was a native to the area while his father, Daniel Webster Hoan the Senior, was an Irish Canadian Civil War veteran.³¹³ Margaret left the family around 1889 and Hoan's father died in 1895 leaving young Daniel Hoan to forgo the schooling to work as a cook to support himself and his three other siblings.³¹⁴ Before his death, Hoan's father had instilled in Daniel an early sympathy with the Socialist Party. Hoan, Sr. has been well-known for his Socialist leanings; so well known in the Milwaukee-Chicago area that, after the bombing in Haymarket Square in 1886

³¹¹ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1915-1916*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1916), Proceedings of Common Council, 686.

³¹² Edward S. Kerstein, *Milwaukee's All-American Mayor; Portrait of Daniel Webster Hoan*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: N.J. Prentice-Hall, 1966), 3.

³¹³ Kerstein, 4.

³¹⁴ Kerstein, 4.

in Chicago, prominent Anarchist Albert Parsons ³¹⁵ stole away to the Hoan's farm and stayed hidden there for several days while avoiding the authorities.³¹⁶

Hoan moved to Milwaukee around 1897 to work as a cook.³¹⁷ There, in 1898, he officially joined the new Social Democratic Party.³¹⁸ In 1901, Hoan passed the entrance exam to the University of Wisconsin in Madison and found work as a cook in a fraternity which allowed him to pay for his studies.³¹⁹ Hoan was an active and popular student; he established the university's first Socialist Club, was Student Body President his senior year of school, and was able to both help campaign in Waukesha for Victor Berger, and keep up with his studies.³²⁰ He graduated in 1905.³²¹

Hoan then moved to Chicago where he again began working as a cook to put himself through law school at Chicago's Kent College.³²² He also met his wife Agnes Bernice Magner, who he married in October 1909.³²³ After obtaining his law degree and passing the bar in Wisconsin and Illinois, a small number of Milwaukee Socialists including Victor Berger and Frederic Heath, convinced him to leave Chicago and relocate his practice back in Milwaukee.³²⁴ There he was instrumental in writing the first workmen's compensation act in

³¹⁵ Edward A. Benoit, *A Democracy of Its Own: Milwaukee's Socialisms, differences and pragmatism*, (M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2009),88.

³¹⁶ He later returned to Chicago, was arrested, found guilty for being part of the bombing that killed seven people, and was hanged

³¹⁷ Benoit, 89.

³¹⁸ Kerstein, 14.

³¹⁹ Benoit, 89.

³²⁰ Kerstein, 15-19.

³²¹ Kerstein, 20.

³²² Kerstein, 20.

³²³ Kerstein, 20.

³²⁴ Kerstein, 21.

the United States.³²⁵ In 1909 he received another visit from the Milwaukee Socialists, this time asking him to run for City Attorney which he, of course, won.³²⁶ Six years later he won the mayoral office against Bading 33,863 to 32,206.³²⁷

While Seidel had been a fierce proponent of integrating planning into the policy of Milwaukee's City Hall, his short tenure in office had limited his objectives. Hoan held the Mayor's chair continuously from 1916-1940, which allowed him to focus on further reaching plans for the city, though he never did have a Socialist majority in Common Council.³²⁸ In his first inaugural address, Hoan promised to a better city, fueled by Whitnall's plans:

In this light let us enter upon our duties and work for a better, bigger and brighter city . . .

Milwaukee's population is rapidly growing. Accordingly, the expansion of the city should be along well planned lines, with a view that newly added territory will be platted scientifically to provide adequate industrial and residential areas properly separated from each other. This will obviate costly mistakes and promote the health, beauty, and utility of our city."³²⁹

Hoan outlined his policies that would develop over the next twenty-some years: city zoning would be applied, new lands would be annexed, and an unofficial city plan would be drafted. And by embracing these policies publically, Hoan was also supporting Whitnall's plans for Milwaukee. In fact, Hoan once bragged "Comrade C.B. Whitnall, in my estimation, is the father of the City Planning movement. As a matter of fact, I think he is recognized as

³²⁵ Kerstein, 24.

³²⁶ Benoit, 91.

³²⁷ Gurda, 221.

³²⁸ Gurda, 221.

³²⁹ "Hoan Asks Council For Co-operation, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 19 April 1916.

one of the big men in the county in this line.”³³⁰ During his first term Hoan reappointed Whitnall to the new BPLC in January 1917 and he was elected president.³³¹ Not all these undertakings would be ultimately be successful, but it was under Hoan’s terms that a majority of Whitnall’s ideas would be undertaken.

Hoan looked to the BPLC, for a “definite city planning scheme for Milwaukee.”³³² Though, they lacked anything other than an advisory role for the Common Council in his first term, during Hoan’s second term more powers were granted to the Board. In 1917, the 1909 Wisconsin State law had enabled basic zoning and building restriction size. In 1919 the law was further amended, broadening the basis for a city to acquire land that was “adjoining or near to such city for use, sublease or sale for any of the following purposes: (1) To relieve congested sections by providing housing facilities suitable to the needs of such city; (2) To provide garden suburbs at reasonable cost to the residents of such city”³³³

Hoan was not only interested in just promoting city planning, but took an active interest in the process himself. Only a few weeks after being elected mayor, Hoan spoke to the Milwaukee Rotary Club about the need for “an organization of business men along the lines of the Rotary Club . . . to discuss

³³⁰ “Letter to Alderman C.H. Bloom Rockford Illinois from November 10, 1917,” Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society

³³¹ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1916-1917*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1917), 1087.1

³³² “Mayor Urges City Planning,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 25 July 1916.

³³³ Arthur Frederick Belitz and Lyman Junius Nash, ed., *Wisconsin Statutes 1919: Embracing All general statutes in force at the close of the General session of 1919, consolidated and in part revised pursuant to sections 43.07, 43.08, 35.19 and these statutes*, Volume 1, (Democrat Printing Company: State Printer, 1919), 822. Accessed October 13, 2012 books.google.com

measures of civic importance regardless of who proposes them and regardless of political considerations.”³³⁴ In 1916 he established the Mayor’s Advisory Council and a voluntary City Beautiful Committee.³³⁵ In early May, Hoan invited twenty-six organizations for “their ideas and cooperation will certainly be assistance to me in carrying out my duties as mayor.”³³⁶ In order to make the Committee apolitical, only one Socialist served as a representative: C.B. Whitnall.³³⁷ The Committee was broken down into six different sub-committees: city planning, city beautification, municipal legislation, park lighting, river and harbor improvements, street paving, traffic regulation and salary revision.³³⁸ In September of 1916, Hoan wrote to the *American City*, “an illustrative review of municipal improvements and civic advance,” and ordered six copies of the magazine for his Committee.³³⁹ Later, Hoan also developed a voluntary City Beautiful Commission for the beautification of downtown Milwaukee.³⁴⁰ Hoan disbanded his Advisory Committee in early 1918, before the municipal elections, allowing the members to speak against him if they wished.³⁴¹ With his reelection in 1918, however, Hoan continued to espouse the importance of a well planned city, even if he was not able to focus many resources on the problem due to the United States entering World War I.

³³⁴ Reinders, 128.

³³⁵ Reinders, 127-132.

³³⁶ Reinders, 128.

³³⁷ Reinders, 129.

³³⁸ Reinders, 129

³³⁹ “Letter From American City to Daniel Hoan, September 27, 1916” Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

³⁴⁰ Reinders, 132.

³⁴¹ Reinders, 130.

World War I had created an economic boom in Milwaukee, but had also shown that the city was lacking in decent, affordable housing for the working class.³⁴² In 1918, Hoan had requested for federal workers' housing be built in the city, yet had been turned down.³⁴³ Even after the war's end, affordable housing was still needed in the city. So in 1918, Hoan established his own Housing Commission; Seidel had established one in 1911, but it had been ineffectual and was discontinued after his defeat.³⁴⁴ Out of the eleven men appointed to the commissions only two Socialists were appointed to the Commission, with Whitnall acting as a representative from the Board of Public Land Commissioners.³⁴⁵ Hoan also reappointed another BPLC member, William Schuchardt, who had been on the original 1911 commission, as its chairman.³⁴⁶ The Commission was broken into two separate committees. The first was to look for short terms goals to fix the housing shortage where they "co-laborated with the Milwaukee Common Council of Defense" to bring immediate relief.³⁴⁷ The second committee studied "the best methods pursued in this country and abroad and to offer a plan of action whereby all elements of our social structure many be properly and economically housed in adequate environments."³⁴⁸

³⁴² National Park Service, "National Register of Historic Places : Garden Homes Historic District" (Washington D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1990).

³⁴³ National Park Service, "Garden Homes Historic District."

³⁴⁴ Reinders, 138.

³⁴⁵ McCarthy, 29-30.

³⁴⁶ William H. Schuchardt, *Schuchardt Sage – Family History*, John Schuchardt Collection, University of Wisconsin o Madison Archives, 92.

³⁴⁷ "Report of the Housing Commission," Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society

³⁴⁸ "Report of the Housing Commission."

In November 1918, the second committee gave their final report and suggestions. They offered seven “solutions” to the housing problem:

- a. The elimination of speculative land values;
- b. Zoning of districts for residential purposes;
- c. Economical and adequate planning of streets, transportation, sewage disposal, water supply, lighting, planting of trees etc.;
- d. Elimination of waste in construction of homes;
- e. Acquiring for wage earners and the benefits of ownership without interfering with labor mobility;
- f. Legislation aiming to stimulate the erection of wage earners’ homes;
- g. Public instruction as to the possibility of housing betterment.³⁴⁹

The first three on this list—land speculation, zoning, and street planning—Whitnall had been advocating for at least a decade prior to the Housing Commission. The second committee also proposed extending the Land Commissioners power for zoning of districts and “to enable it (the BPLC) to properly plan for outlying districts the layout off streets, grades, recreation grounds, transportation, etc. consistent with a general city plan.”³⁵⁰ Whitnall’s belief in making Milwaukee a city of “Garden Homes” also found traction here, as the Commission also suggested the acquiring of legislation to build a municipal housing cooperation, like those in Europe. This suggestion was supported by almost the entire Commission and they began to move forward with plans.

In the summer of 1919, Hoan and the Housing Commission were given the opportunity to act. The Wisconsin State Legislature established Chapter 402 of the Laws of Wisconsin of 1919, which defined the powers and privileges

³⁴⁹ “Report of the Housing Commission.”

³⁵⁰ “Report of the Housing Commission”

of housing corporations established by municipalities.³⁵¹ That same year the Garden Homes Company was capitalized at \$500,000: \$250,000 was preferred stock and \$250,000 common stock.³⁵² The city of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County each bought 500 shares of the preferred stock for \$50,000 in the summer of 1920.³⁵³ The common stock would be purchased by those moving into the homes. The plan was for the preferred stock to then be retired slowly, after the project was established.³⁵⁴

In 1921 Garden Homes Corporation was formerly incorporated and in March the *Milwaukee Journal* advertised Garden Homes was looking for “sites suitable for 50 to 75 homes . . . Anyone who has unimproved acreage in Milwaukee county may make an offer, addressed to C.B. Whitnall, Commonwealth Mutual Savings Bank”³⁵⁵ On July 25 1921, the Corporation officially bought the Groelling tract, which was 29 acres of farm land to the north of city limits.³⁵⁶ On September 21st, Mayor Hoan held a groundbreaking ceremony on the site; earlier that month proposed floor plans had circulated in the local papers, which had been designed by local architect, Board of Public Land Commissioners appointee, Housing Commission chairman William Schuchardt.³⁵⁷

³⁵¹ Helen Terry, “Garden Homes Housing Project : a summary,” (Milwaukee: Municipal Reference Library, 1934) , 1.

³⁵² Terry, 2

³⁵³ Terry, 2.

³⁵⁴ William Mathias Lamers, “The Garden Homes Project: A Dissertation on Cooperative Home Building Written in Collaboration with Lawrence Francis Daly,” (M.A. Thesis: Marquette University, 1923), 7.

³⁵⁵ “Housing Corporation Invites Land Offers,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 4 March 1921.

³⁵⁶ National Park Service “Garden Homes Historic District.”

³⁵⁷ National Park Service “Garden Homes Historic District.”

William Schuchardt was perhaps the most befitting man to sit on the Housing Commission, even ahead of Whitnall. He was a Milwaukee native born in April 1874.³⁵⁸ He attended first the University of Wisconsin and then transferred to Cornell University where he graduated with a degree in architecture in 1895.³⁵⁹ After graduation he moved back to Milwaukee but found his education lacking, so he traveled between East Coast architectural firms and Europe while attempting to supplement his knowledge. Before moving back to Milwaukee, he worked in Cass Gilbert's studio; the two remained friends even after Schuchardt returned to Milwaukee to reestablish his practice in 1905.³⁶⁰ In 1911, Schuchardt was both named to the Housing Committee and married Gertrude Nunnemacher.³⁶¹ Her mother, as a wedding gift to the couple, paid for a honeymoon in Europe, which Schuchardt used as the opportunity to tour and study different cooperative housing commissions in England and Germany. When he returned, he was the expert in Milwaukee on how to plan and design something like Garden Homes.

To increase interest and support for the project, between 1922 and 1923, Whitnall published a pamphlet, "A Few Facts about Housing," which collected several publications supporting Garden Homes. "Co-Partnership Housing Has Become Permanent in Europe" which gave interested parties an idea of where the Housing Commission was coming from, and the "Garden Homes Prospectus" outlined the corporation's methods and financing.

³⁵⁸ Schuchardt, 84.

³⁵⁹ Schuchardt, 85-86.

³⁶⁰ Schuchardt 90-91.

³⁶¹ Schuchardt, 91.

Meant to be for Milwaukee's working-class, the homes cost \$4500 to build, by union workers, and interested parties had to fill out a lengthy application to be considered. There were 700 applicants for the homes but only 105 homes were built on Groelling tract between 1921 and 1923.³⁶² Schuchardt designed nine different two-story houses, each with the same basic floor plan. Of the 105 built, eleven were built to be double family homes, while all others were single-family.³⁶³ The homes were laid out in a fan-like subdivision, like a small English village except for the broad green-space in the approximate center of development. Streets were named after famous English garden cities like Port Sunlight and Letchworth.³⁶⁴ Construction was completed in 1924.³⁶⁵

Hoan began to brag about the new cooperative almost immediately. In 1924, he boasted: "Milwaukee, in short, is the first large city in America that has started to apply successfully, the abstract principles of Americanism in the concrete realm of equal opportunities for the people."³⁶⁶ Yet, within a year the development fell into problems. Since the city of Milwaukee had little room in its limits for a large scale housing development, the project had been staged north of the city. Yet, state law prevented easy annexation of land. When it was finally annexed it accrued a \$300 to \$750 cost onto the new homes

³⁶² National Park Service, "Garden Homes Historic District."

³⁶³ National Park Service, "Garden Homes Historic District."

³⁶⁴ National Park Service, "Garden Homes Historic District."

³⁶⁵ National Park Service, "Garden Homes Historic District."

³⁶⁶ Thomas H. Hubka and Judith Kenny, "Surveying Milwaukee's Residential Landscapes" *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, Margo Anderson and Victor Green, Ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) 240.

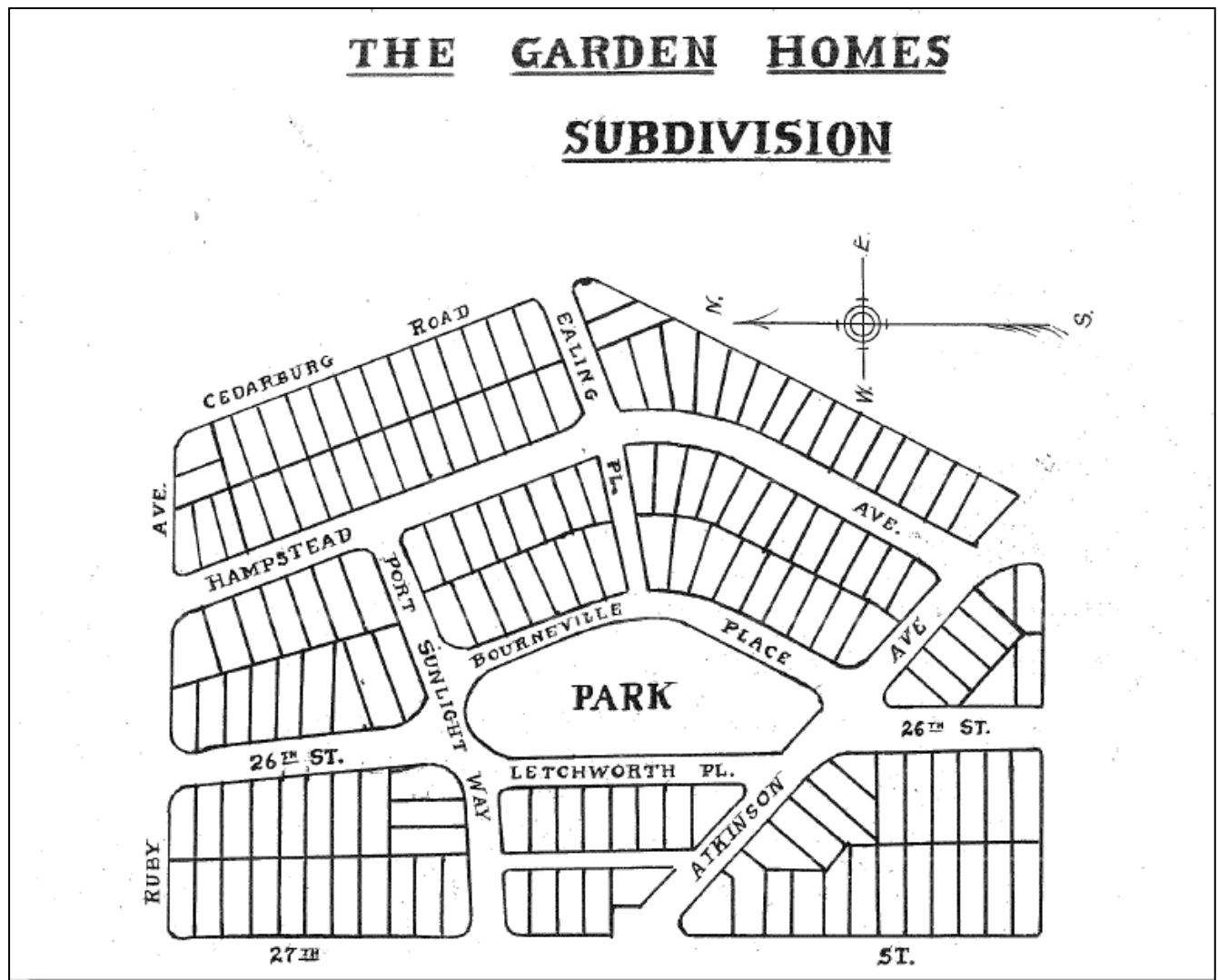


Figure 14: Garden Homes layout, from *The Garden Homes Project, Dissertation on the Cooperative Home Building* by William Mathias Lamers

dwellers for sewer upgrades and extensions.³⁶⁷ There was also another, underlying problem within the district. The tenants of the homes did not ‘own’ them but had an indefinite lease on the property with their purchase of stock in the Garden Homes Corporations. They could make improvements to the home, as long as they were approved by the Garden Homes Board of Directors, but if they were to want to move, they would be selling their stock, not the home, and thus they could only hope to increase their homes worth. In 1924 a resident of Garden Homes, Adolf Jennrich wrote to Hoan stating:

Respected Sir: -

My present home is in the Garden Homes. I like the homes I am also satisfied with the price paid for them. Our Pass Book reads we only have an indefinite lease on the homes. Where does that come in will be paid for in about 16 years? What guarantee have we that we will ever really own them or in other words get our deed to them? What method will be used to retire the preferred stock and when will we have a voice in running of our homes?”³⁶⁸

After both controversies, the State Legislature allowed for the Corporation to be dissolved and the sale of the homes to the owners in June 1925.³⁶⁹ In 1935 in a letter to Jerome Gaspard, a research associate for the Federal Loan Bank Board, Hoan also attributed the failure for the payments of the householders not maturing fast enough and an unfriendly replacement Secretary for the Board of Directors, who Hoan claimed mislead those moving in the

³⁶⁷ National Park Service, “Garden Homes Historic District.”

³⁶⁸ “Letter from Adolf Jennrich to Danil Hoan, May 7, 1924,” Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

³⁶⁹ National Park Service “Garden Homes Historic District.”

cooperative nature of the housing development.³⁷⁰ Yet, Hoan was proud of the accomplishment and would continue to brag about the development for the rest of his career. In 1927 he replied to a Michigan man:

In reading your communication of Sept. 17th I was quite surprised at your statement that you had been in touch with the Garden Homes project here and 'found they are much discouraged with the project.' I cannot understand just what you mean or who could have furnished you this information. As far as I know anything about the Garden Homes project, it was a great success . . . Anything to the contrary is just misinformation.³⁷¹

Mayor Seidel was also enthusiastic about the project; he bought a home in the community and lived in it after the community was no longer a cooperative.

William Schuchardt, on the other hand, was more disgruntled:

This venture [Garden Homes] was terminated by profound stupidity and inordinate greed of the little men whom we were trying to help. The glitter of possible profit, through efforts not their own, destroyed their appreciation of what they had in hand. The failure was regrettable. The scheme has much merit and its applications was never before attempted in America.³⁷²

Concurrently with Garden Homes, Whitnall, Schuchardt and the BPLC worked towards other goals suggested by the 1918 Housing Report.

Schuchardt was a valuable ally, because he had both the training and worldly experience which Whitnall lacked. In the 1918 Annual Report Whitnall noted "Much effort and time of the commission has been spent during the year in the development of a comprehensive city plan. Although it has a small staff of

³⁷⁰ "Letter to Jerome T. Gaspard from Daniel Hoan December 9, 1935," Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society

³⁷¹ "Letter to S.H. Herman from Daniel Hoan, Oct 7 1927," Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society

³⁷² Schuchardt, 92-93.

assistants at its disposal considerable progress can be recorded.”³⁷³ By April 1919 they were able to tackle two big problems – the location of the Civic Center and the possibility of zoning in Milwaukee.

The Civic Center plans had laid practically dormant the decade since its original proposal. While a location had been suggested in the original report, and endorsed by Olmsted and Nolen, some argued for the site to lie to the east of the Milwaukee River, where the original county courthouse sat. In April 1919 the debate for the location still raged on; even within the BPLC the members could not decide on the location. At a public meeting, Whitnall and a few others on the commission voiced support for the original location. A little over a week later, Whitnall, Schuchardt, and others released their own report “Groupings of Public Buildings,” which included a revised plan for the Center. The report argued that the location of the Civic Center needed to be determined first before the Commission could complete a Master City plan.

The Board has determined that if the placing of a group of public buildings, or as it has been termed a “Civic Center” or “Administration Group” should bear a direct relation to the street system, then the choice of a desirable location for it is rather limited. That such a relation should obtain is an opinion held by all city planners.³⁷⁴

The report suggested keeping the Civic Center in its original proposed location.³⁷⁵ The BPLC liked the West Side site because it was located in an area that would allow all the planned main new transportation lines to go be

³⁷³Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Board of Public Land Commissioner Annual Report - 1918*, Milwaukee Legislative Reference Bureau

³⁷⁴ Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Groupings of Public Buildings: A Report to the Milwaukee Common Council*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Board, 1919), 8.

³⁷⁵ Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Groupings of Public Buildings: A Report to the Milwaukee Common Council*, 8.

developed around the Civic Center instead of straight through it which would allow a large public gathering space to be created in the center of the buildings.

In their April 1919 report, the BPLC also urged that this matter needed to be completed soon, for Milwaukee was growing rapidly and they firmly believed the population could reach 1 million people.³⁷⁶ The Board suggested a Revised Plan based on the earlier Metropolitan Park Commission plan, which included the additional of diagonal streets through Cedar Street and Sixth Street to Grand Avenue and Eighth Street and Sixth Street to Ninth and Prairie Streets.³⁷⁷ Thus, instead of a large box, the area would be an uneven pentagram, with large areas of open space for the congregation for public meetings and rallies. Two other plans were half-heartedly suggested, but the original was considered the most “attractive solution” and would “be unique and give an added distinction to this city and in comparison with the splendid undertakings of a similar nature in Cleveland, Denver, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and other American cities, it would easily hold its own.”³⁷⁸ Although a 1947 report suggested that this new plan “violated some of the sound basic principles established in the 1909 plan,” it was the first to include consider the impact of the automobile. Whitnall was a very early proponent of the auto, for he saw them as another tool to move the common man outside

³⁷⁶ Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Groupings of Public Buildings: A Report to the Milwaukee Common Council*, 13.

³⁷⁷ Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Groupings of Public Buildings: A Report to the Milwaukee Common Council*, 22.

³⁷⁸ Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Groupings of Public Buildings: A Report to the Milwaukee Common Council*, 34.

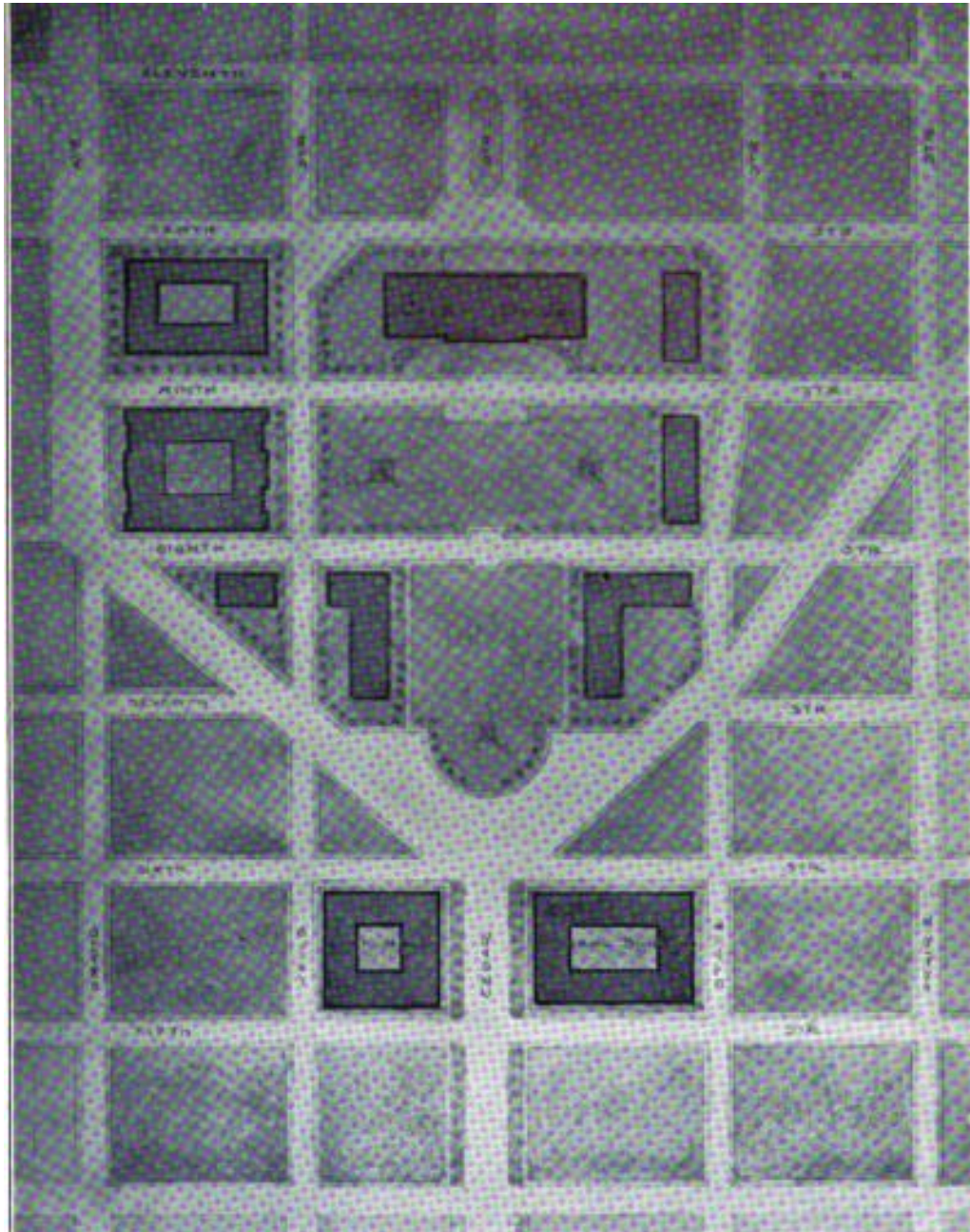


Figure 15: Revised plan for Civic Center, from *Groupings of Public Buildings, 1919*, from books.google.com

the urban environment and into nature. In 1920, the Civic Center location was up for a vote for Milwaukee and the original location was approved.³⁷⁹

Even after the victory, however, the project still moved slowly. In 1921 a special committee of architects was appointed to study the suggested plan and come up with a proposal, then in 1923 it was suggested that a nationwide contest be held for the design of the County Courthouse. By 1925, the *Milwaukee Journal* reported that at that time there were no plans for any of the other buildings suggested in the 1919 report except for the courthouse and the public safety building, but that the county and city had slowly been buying the land in the suggested area.³⁸⁰ The spring 1925 election slowed the process further when the city was to vote on a 20 million dollar bond issue which would have been used for the land acquisition, demolition of the current structures on the properties, construction of the new buildings, and widening the streets. The measure was voted down.³⁸¹ This happened to be the last straw for Schuchardt, who “was ready for other worlds to conquer on the following day.”³⁸²

Construction on the site did not begin until 1928 when the University of Wisconsin put up a building for its Extension Program. One year later, a city-county building, the Public Safety Building, designed by New York architect Albert Randolph Ross, was constructed.³⁸³ The County Courthouse, the

³⁷⁹ Milwaukee's Citizen's Government Research Bureau, *The development of the Civic Center in Milwaukee* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Board, 1947), 2.

³⁸⁰ “Civic Center Project Work of Many Years,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 27 March 1925.

³⁸¹ McCarthy, 62

³⁸² Schuchardt, 99.

³⁸³ McCarthy, 266.

centerpiece for the project, finally began in 1929, after another of Ross's designs was chosen. Constructed as a large, multi-story, Neoclassical temple – the building was finally completed in 1931 for a total of seven million dollars. While some architectural historians have subsequently praised the design as “the last of the important Wisconsin buildings in the great classical resurgence,” though at the time, not everyone agreed. Frank Lloyd Wright reportedly called the building “a million dollar rock-pile.”³⁸⁴

While the Civic Center was largely a mess, the BPLC were more successful with zoning and annexation projects. Whitnall had advocated for the use of zoning in Milwaukee since he was first placed on a planning board in 1907. In his 1911 *Milwaukee City Planning* he noted the constant conflict between the business interests and residential areas. He suggested: “Place these districts under special city ordinances, let the platting and arrangement of [railroad] tracks be made to serve the interests of those doing business there to the exclusion of residents . . . Of course, this means that residence areas are to be arranged for and where the factories and warehouses are to be excluded entirely.”³⁸⁵

The Zoning Act of Chapter 404 of Wisconsin for 1907 authorized cities “to regulate the location of industries and buildings and the height and bulk of the buildings.”³⁸⁶ In 1911, the Common Council had discussed the possibility of restricting the height of buildings erected in the city center. At this time,

³⁸⁴ “Milwaukee County Courthouse,” <http://preview.wisconsinhistory.org/>, accessed 9/20/2012

³⁸⁵ Whitnall, *Milwaukee City Planning*, 14-15.

³⁸⁶ Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Zoning for Milwaukee: Tentative Report of the Board of Public Land Commissioners, June 21 1920*, (Milwaukee: C.H. Kronenberger, 1920) 49.

President Clas, writing on behalf of the City Planning Commission, wrote against the movement claiming “At present Milwaukee has so few skyscrapers that the only effect is for good rather than for the opposite. If the city, instead of undertaking to limit the height of future buildings, will grapple with and solve much more urgent problems, the matter of high buildings will take care of itself.”³⁸⁷ Under their enabling legislation, the Board of Public Land Commissioners was allowed to create residential district that can be seen as a precursor to modern zoning in Milwaukee. An earlier law for zoning, which appears to have been passed under Seidel, was declared unconstitutional in 1913.³⁸⁸

In Hoan’s 1918 inaugural address, he claimed that City Planning was his very “basis” for a making a better, bigger and brighter Milwaukee. The first step would be for the BPLC’s “work of properly platting the lands adjacent to the city, and should assist in working out a law to be submitted to the coming legislation, to more systematically encourage and control the building of homes.”³⁸⁹ During that year, the BPLC completed a survey on the entire city and the present use of all the property. They also invited Arthur Comey, a city planning consultant from Cambridge Massachusetts, to advise and recommend how to zone and district the city.³⁹⁰ At this time Comey suggested three classes of use for the districts: restricted to residence, restricted against

³⁸⁷ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1911-1912*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1912), Proceedings of Common Council, 1019.

³⁸⁸ Frederick I. Olson, *The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941*, (Ph.D Thesis: Harvard University, 1952), 427-428.

³⁸⁹ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1918-1919*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1919), 3.

³⁹⁰ Milwaukee Common Council, *Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee for the years 1918-1919*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Council, 1919), 846

industry, and unrestricted. Later, the BPLC also invited Edward Bassett, one of the author's of New York City's zoning ordinance, which had been the first in the country, to comment on the process.³⁹¹

In the first half of 1920 the Board released two reports. The first, "Zoning for Milwaukee," included observations by Comey and Bassett, pictures and maps detailing the problem areas within Milwaukee, and the suggested zoning ordinance. Zoning was endorsed as a necessity to combat congestion, disease prevention, fire protection, and the need for adequate light and air in modern downtowns. Milwaukee would be divided into four districts, each with three separate restrictions: Use restrictions (Broken down into Residence Districts, Local Business Districts, Commercial and Light Manufacturing Districts, and Industrial Districts), Height Restrictions (125 foot, 85 foot, 60 foot, and 40 foot), and Area Restrictions in which the city is divided into four district—A, B, C, and D—and each had "restrictions controlling the percentage of the lot that may be built upon."³⁹² The report included the proposed ordinance that would be considered by the Common Council and the state enabling legislation.

The second report, "Restricted Heights of Buildings," appears to have been written later. While there had been little objection to the zoning of "use" and "area" in Milwaukee, the limiting of height for buildings was challenged. The report was a counter-argument that restricting the height of buildings was just as essential for the health, safety and welfare of Milwaukee's citizens as

³⁹¹ McCarthy, 34.

³⁹²Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Zoning for Milwaukee...*, 21.

the other zoning components. They compared Milwaukee's height restriction to other modern cities in America:

A limitation of 125 feet is therefore not a hardship on property owners . . . it will tend to keep in hand the dangers incident to groups of skyscrapers. For such reasons Boston set a limit of 125 feet in 1911, Washington a limit of 110 feet and New York a limit of 125 feet for 5th Avenue. A similar limit for Milwaukee seems to be well within reason.³⁹³

It included reports from planners across the country supporting the height limit for downtowns, especially at 125 feet.

The ordinance finally went to the Common Council and was voted into law November 1920 complete with the 125 feet restrictions.³⁹⁴ Whitnall later wrote:

Milwaukee, quite a number of years ago, adopted a zoning ordinance for the purpose of promoting the congenial environment of residential areas in particular. This ordinance does not presume to tell you what to do. It is, however, an implied acknowledgement that before the adoption of this ordinance the city had not planned for a desirable physical development but had now recognized some of the existing ills, and therefore had imposed a number of restrictions for the purpose of preventing further decline in the city's social and economic welfare.³⁹⁵

Around the same time, annexation became a necessary fight for the BPLC. Milwaukee's population continued to grow, but there was little room for new housing. In 1910 the population had hovered around 375,000. By 1920, the population increased to 457,000, but was still centered on 25 square miles of city. The 1920 national census declared Milwaukee the second most

³⁹³ Board of Public Land Commissioners, *Restricted Heights of Buildings*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Board, 1920).

³⁹⁴ Florence Shulson, *The History of Planning Activity in Milwaukee 1892-1952*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Board of Public Land Commissioners, 1952), 4.

³⁹⁵ C.B. Whitnall, *What Progress Costs Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee: [s.n.], 1935), 3-4.

congested city, behind only New York City.³⁹⁶ To fix this congestion, which Whitnall had long complained about, the BPLC looked to annex new lands in the city limits to spread out and create to begin decentralizing the city's housing stock. The construction of Garden Homes outside the city helped. Prior to the 1920s, the only way in which Milwaukee could bring new land in was through the request of the property owners.³⁹⁷ Through this process, Milwaukee grew only four square miles in thirty years, for private citizens had neither the time nor the means to successfully complete the petitioning process.³⁹⁸ The fight over the annexation of Garden Homes changed the process because the area lay partly in Wauwatosa and part in the Town of Milwaukee. The annexation was blocked by three different lawsuits.³⁹⁹ Though the land was annexed in January 1924, the lawsuit from a Fred Zweifel, who had owned 55 acres of the land, held it from being legal until December 1925, when the State Legislature upheld the annexation and "paved the way for a vigorous but controversial annexation program by the city."⁴⁰⁰

In 1923, the BPLC recommended to the Common Council the creation of a new and separate division for the annexation to handle the intricacies of the process. So in 1924 the Division of Annexation was established with a staff of six people and an annual budget of \$12,000 in 1924.⁴⁰¹ By 1926, their staff had been cut to three people and their budget to \$10,000, yet they still

³⁹⁶ Gurda, 246.

³⁹⁷ McCarthy, 45.

³⁹⁸ McCarthy, 45.

³⁹⁹ National Park Service "Garden Homes Historic District."

⁴⁰⁰ National Park Service, "Garden Homes Historic District."

⁴⁰¹ Joel Rast, "Annexation Policy in Milwaukee: An Historical Institutional Approach," *Polity* Volume 39, Number 1 (2007), 62.

continued to annex lands into Milwaukee. By the end of the decade Milwaukee had grown from twenty-five to forty-four square miles.⁴⁰²

As President, Whitnall guided the Board through these changes. As the work of the BPLC began to take up much of his time, he asked for a paid position, expressly for him to remain on the Board. The position of Secretary to the BPLC was created, which he held from 1922 to 1945. Shuchardt took over as president of the Board until he ultimately left Milwaukee in June 1925 to take a position as a professor of Architecture at Cornell University.⁴⁰³ In his unpublished autobiography he explained that he could not stay in Milwaukee after the death of his wife Gertrude in August 1919, and the final straw was the rejection of a street widening referendum spring 1925. After remarrying again, he moved to Los Angeles where he was eventually appointed a member of their City Planning Commission.⁴⁰⁴

The Civic Center, zoning, and the annexation all became parts of what Whitnall called a decentralized regional city. It was not that he disliked cities but that his vision depended upon a well-planned and laid-out central city. To him, in order for a city to work well for its citizens, natural elements would have to be reincorporated into their plan. And Milwaukee was congested and dirty with little natural area for the people. There would no longer be the “checkerboard” of the earlier planned cities that he despised; instead, the communities would grow along the land’s natural contours. Milwaukee could be saved, but it had to start from the ground and work slowly. Garden Homes

⁴⁰² McCarthy, 66.

⁴⁰³ Schuchardt, 103.

⁴⁰⁴ Schuchardt, 111.

really kick-started Whitnall's plans, as it took a small step towards his larger goal of emptying the downtown of residential areas into the suburbs. In his master vision, Milwaukee's citizens would move to live and play in the garden suburbs that were platted around the parkways that radiated out from the center of the city. They would take the well-planned car lines, or later their own cars, and come into the city for work, entertainment, and education but would return to their homes among the grass and Milwaukee's rivers. Ultimately for this vision to work, the County of Milwaukee also had to be involved.

Planning in Milwaukee County formally began in 1907. Concurrently with the establishment of the Metropolitan Park Commission, Whitnall and others secured state legislation for the creation of a Milwaukee County Park Commission.⁴⁰⁵ It had seven members, each serving a seven year term, with one term expiring every year.⁴⁰⁶ The Milwaukee County Board approved the appointments.⁴⁰⁷ The first meeting was in January 1908; Whitnall was named as a member, as was Alfred Clas.⁴⁰⁸ Working in the greater geographical area, the County Park Commission was "to procure park areas in advance of the city's ability and the city's growth."⁴⁰⁹ And under the legislation, the Commission was also established as the *de facto* planning board for the

⁴⁰⁵ "Undated Whitnall Biography," 4.

⁴⁰⁶ "Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commissioner and City of Milwaukee Park Board" Milwaukee County Parks Commission Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2.

⁴⁰⁷ "Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commission and City of Milwaukee Park Board," 2.

⁴⁰⁸ Robert W. Wells, "History of Milwaukee County Park Commission" Milwaukee County Parks Commission, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

⁴⁰⁹ "Undated Whitnall Biography," 4.

county.⁴¹⁰ Whitnall would serve on the Board from its inception in 1908 until 1947, and would serve as its unpaid secretary from 1919 to 1926.⁴¹¹ It was under this commission that Whitnall's largest project—the consolidation and creation of Milwaukee County's parkways and parks—would take place.

This commission acted at a slower pace than the Metropolitan Park Commission; it did not acquire any land for a county park until 1910 when they bought the 41 acre Winkler Tract along the Menomonee River in Wauwatosa.⁴¹² Originally known as Sholes Park, after C. Latham Sholes, the inventor of the modern typewriter, it was later changed to Jacobus Park, after a Wauwatosa county supervisor.⁴¹³ By the 1920s, the Commission began to look outside of just planning county parks to transportation planning through the county. In 1923, Whitnall introduced his preliminary plan for “parked driveways” or “parked ways” around the county proposing 84 miles of parkways that would follow the natural landscape of the area.⁴¹⁴ As he had championed before, most of these drives would follow the contours of the lakeshore, rivers and creeks in the area. They would facilitate the easy movement into the suburbs as Whitnall advocated and create more green spaces for the public to gather and play. The idea was then supported by two

⁴¹⁰ E.A. Howard, “County and Regional Planning,” *Roads and Streets*, Volume 69, Number 11, November 1929, Daniel Hoan Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

⁴¹¹ “Whitnall Quits as Park Aid,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 11 June 1947.

⁴¹² “Wastelands Become Beauty Sport as County Park System Grows,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May 1936.

⁴¹³ “Jacobus Park,” <http://county.milwaukee.gov/HistoryoftheParks16572.htm>, accessed October 13, 2012.

⁴¹⁴ Gurda, 271.

Socialist state assemblymen who in that same year introduced a bill for the city and county to acquire lands along waterways for city parks.⁴¹⁵

One year later, Whitnall and the Commission asked the County Board for the ability to create a Regional Planning Department, which would function as a rural planning board in the unincorporated parts of the county.⁴¹⁶ As Whitnall later described it later: “Regional Planning offered an escape, and we determined to make every effort to rescue the regions beyond our city and guide their development, if possible, so as to conserve human values, and at the same time afford greater efficiency in the conduct of business.”⁴¹⁷ The department began in March 1924, and three activities were proposed almost immediately: development of the proposed parkway system, regional platting, and zoning for the county.⁴¹⁸

The parkway plan was one of Whitnall’s oldest designs; a piece of the early Civic Center, and officially introduced in 1923. As the secretary for the County Parks Commission, Whitnall used his position to argue for parkways as a force of preservation and decentralization. “It takes in the most beautiful scenery surrounding the city of Milwaukee, tying in Milwaukee’s satellites, and paralleling the streams which constitute the surface drainage of the county, and should be preserved.”⁴¹⁹ The plan was supported by some, and called impractical by others because of its possible high price tag. But by 1925, the

⁴¹⁵ Gurda, 53.

⁴¹⁶ C.B. Whitnall, “The Place of Planning in Public Administration,” Charles Whitnall Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society, 4.

⁴¹⁷ Whitnall, “The Place of Planning in Public Administration,” 3

⁴¹⁸ Howard, “County and Regional Planning.”

⁴¹⁹ Howard, “County and Regional Planning.”

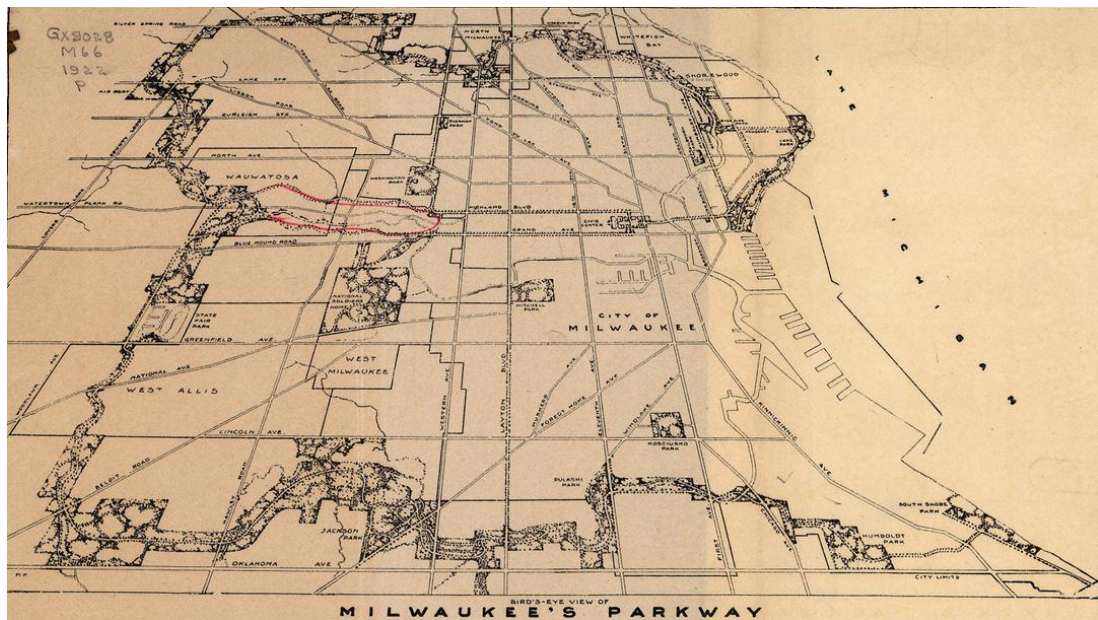


Figure 16 – Bird's-eye view of Milwaukee's Parkway from 1922, from wisconsinhistory.org

proposed parkways system became official county legislation when the original 1923 plan was enacted into law with little revision.⁴²⁰ Under the law governing boards of local municipalities were able acquire areas for parkways purposes through condemnation, and pay for the land.⁴²¹

To gain support and educate the public, the County started small. Construction on any parkway land did not begin until 1928, when the first section was laid out as an “experiment.”⁴²² One and a half miles were planned along the Menomonee River, with an additional mile added the next year. This first part cost the county less than \$100,000, for most of the land had been donated by the owners, who saw this as a way to increase their own property prices.⁴²³ Whitnall later claimed that these first two miles allowed the plan to become popular and they “have proven our point that it is cheaper to acquire this parkway land along the shores of the streams” as opposed to the construction of storm sewers.⁴²⁴ Milwaukee County used the state parkways law first in 1929 to acquire land in Oak Creek; and this part of the parkways was paid for by the “enhanced value of their [the property owners] real estate.”⁴²⁵ The project continued in a piecemeal fashion, the County slowly picking up land when it could afford the area or when it was donated. The parkway project was helped along in 1926 when an ordinance for the widening streets for the right-of-way was passed by the County Board.⁴²⁶ And some

⁴²⁰ “Wastelands Become Beauty Sport as County Park System Grows,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May1936.

⁴²¹ “Wastelands Become Beauty Sport as County Park System Grows,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May1936

⁴²² “Wastelands Become Beauty Sport as County Park System Grows,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May1936

⁴²³ “Wastelands Become Beauty Sport as County Park System Grows,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May1936

⁴²⁴ Whitnall, “The Place of Planning in Public Administration,” 4.

⁴²⁵ “Wastelands Become Beauty Sport as County Park System Grows,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May1936

⁴²⁶ Howard, “County and Regional Planning.”

projects, like that of Lincoln Memorial Drive, took years of landfill activities, but when it was completed in 1929, the three-mile parkway next to Lake Michigan was considered “one of the finest stretches of urban lakefront on the entire Great Lakes.”⁴²⁷ Even through the Depression the project moved forward, with help from the Federal Government and the CCC and the WPA.⁴²⁸

Then, in October 1927, with a focus on creating a regional plan, the Board of Supervisors adopted a county-wide zoning ordinance.⁴²⁹ Nearly two years of work by the County Parks Board prepare the way. Wisconsin state law allowed for only the creation of Use Districts only, so seven different classes were created: “A” residence district, “B” residence district, local business district, agricultural district, commercial and light manufacturing district, heavy industrial district, and the unrestricted district.⁴³⁰ The zoning would be policed by a County Building Inspector and a Board of Appeals.

Another part of Whitnall’s ‘regional city’ plan was to connect Milwaukee’s city parks and Milwaukee’s county’s parks through the long stretches of parkways, which would create a large, expanded green space which would radiate outwards in the suburbs. Others argued for a consolidated park system to cut down the number of appointed park officials each suburb and city needed.⁴³¹ By the 1930s there were seven different boards acting in the county, hampering any long term planning goals.⁴³²

⁴²⁷ Gurda, 270-271.

⁴²⁸ “Wastelands Become Beauty Sport as County Park System Grows,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 31 May 1936

⁴²⁹ Howard, “County and Regional Planning.”

⁴³⁰ Howard, “County and Regional Planning.”

⁴³¹ Wells, “History of Milwaukee County Park Commission.”

⁴³² “Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commission and City of Milwaukee Park Board.”

Wauwatosa had already donated land in 1923 for the parkways system. Some of the other smaller suburbs in the county began to donate their parks to the county in the early 1930s. Milwaukee suburb, Cudahy, following public sentiment, was the first to donate the 60 acre Sheridan Park in 1931.⁴³³ The County accepted this park's maintenance and development, but all financial obligations, such as any debt left on the land, would be kept by the city.⁴³⁴

In 1934, the County Board appointed a fifteen man committee to study two questions. The first was whether to recommend the consolidation of several governmental functions within Milwaukee County. Second, if the proposed consolidation would lead to a decrease in spending for those functions that were consolidated.⁴³⁵ Their report was completed on October 10, 1934. It suggested that the city and county parks could be combined, an action that would save both governments \$100,000 annually. This figure was hotly contested.⁴³⁶

The city of Milwaukee resisted the idea at first, but Whitnall and other Socialists, campaigned to turn over the parks to the county.⁴³⁷ This faction also believed, however, that if the county were to take over the city's parks, it should also take over the over \$4 million dollars of indebtedness that the city had procure. At the same time the factions held that the city got to name the

⁴³³Wells, "History of Milwaukee County Park Commission," A37

⁴³⁴ "Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commission and City of Milwaukee Park Board."

⁴³⁵ "Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commission and City of Milwaukee Park Board."

⁴³⁶ "Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commission and City of Milwaukee Park Board."

⁴³⁷ "Whitnall favors Merger of Parks," *Milwaukee Journal*, 13 January 1936.

majority of the members of the new park board.⁴³⁸ Milwaukee voted for the issue in April 1936 in a three part referendum. Citizens decided to turn the parks over to the county 125,000 to 43,000, but they turned down the other two suggestions of the transfer of debt and power over the park board.⁴³⁹ The city transferred the parks over to the county on January 1st of the following year. Over 1,000 acres of 37 parks⁴⁴⁰ were added to the County's 27 parks and parkways and 3,387 acres.⁴⁴¹

After the consolidation, the projected savings were found to be incorrect. "Unforeseen occurrences" that influenced government expenses had not been anticipated. In a 1938 County report another justification was provided with a familiar "ring,"

[T]he opportunity that it affords the present Commission to develop a metropolitan park system for Milwaukee by a long range and master plan, based on a consolidation of natural factors as air, light, water, population trends, social tendencies and cultural needs. Such master planning can only be made for an area large enough to include all the essential natural factors, by an authority and control of the whole area involved.⁴⁴²

Whitnall's belief in parkways and the consolidation of the parks was the right one. In 1932, a large suburban park, originally Hales Corners Park, was named Whitnall Park in his honor.⁴⁴³

Throughout his life, in addition to his work on his numerous commissions and his role in the Commonwealth Savings Bank, Whitnall also

⁴³⁸ Wells, "History of the Milwaukee County Parks Commission."

⁴³⁹ Wells, "History of the Milwaukee County Parks Commission."

⁴⁴⁰ Wells, "History of the Milwaukee County Parks Commission.", A37

⁴⁴¹ "Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commission and City of Milwaukee Park Board."

⁴⁴² "Consolidation of Parks Operated by Milwaukee County Park Commission and City of Milwaukee Park Board."

⁴⁴³ "Winter in Whitnall Park," <http://www.milwaukeehistory.net>, accessed October 31, 2012

took the time to write and lecture on planning. In 1929, in an article for *Parks and Recreation*, he criticized the construction of apartment building that he felt kept residents from enjoying the full expanse of nature they required. In addition by keeping children from the proper amount of light and air, this kind of construction raised the risks of moral delinquency, “Unless a child has constant opportunity for the exercise of all its faculties in direct contact with Mother Earth, degeneracy is a natural consequence.”⁴⁴⁴ He went on to suggest what he saw as a better solution, one he must have seen while visiting his son Gordon in Los Angeles. The “court” which he saw appeared to “function as a multiple dwelling without the harmful influence of the apartment buildings.”⁴⁴⁵ This idea is little different than his idea about the importance of parks and parkways, for being in the country is always the more advantageous.

Whitnall’s plans for the city of Milwaukee rarely changed, but evolved over time. Much of his later writings and lectures show that even decades later he still advocated many of the same principle. In 1935 he stated:

“While we have neglected to study the needs of our workers’ welfare the English industrialist has learned that his employees are more efficient if their environment at work and at home is right, and that the younger generations who never were subjected to the menace of crowded devitalizing city life, advance to still higher standards as fellowship becomes more general and profit not the only goal.”⁴⁴⁶

Whitnall worked well into his eighties and lived to see many of the causes he advanced come to fruition, though it appears he left both of his positions at the city and at the county unhappily. In 1943 he resigned from the

⁴⁴⁴ C.B. Whitnall, “What About Apartments?” *Parks Recreation* January-February 1929, Charles Whitnall Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society, 5.

⁴⁴⁵ Whitnall, “What About Apartments,” 8.

⁴⁴⁶ Whitnall, “What Progress Costs Milwaukee,” 9.

Board of Public Land Commissioners⁴⁴⁷ and in 1947 he left the County Parks Commission, citing his failing health but also revealing that he had been unhappy with the pace at which the Commission was acting on his proposals.⁴⁴⁸ Throughout the 1940s he was honored by several organizations and city officials. On June 27th, 1940 the Socialist Party gathered to pay homage to his work in Whitnall Park. Mayor Seidel spoke and called him a “Preacher, Educator, Writer or a New Economy – Prophet, and Seer of a Coming Epoch . . . I have in mind a monument: Whitnall standing on a promontory, tall, gaunt, erect, smiling sweeping his right hand and his left over a panorama, calling the unseen and unseeing millions: ‘Come – build – plan – play – laugh – sing.’ That’s Comrade Charles B. Whitnall.”⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷“County’s Beauty Writes a Eulogy for Whitnall,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 5 January 1949.

⁴⁴⁸ “Whitnall Quits as Park Aid” *Milwaukee Journal*, 11 June 1947.

⁴⁴⁹ “Emil Seidel Speech, July 27th 1940 in Milwaukee,” Socialist Party Collection, Milwaukee Public Library.

CONCLUSION

Charles Whitnall was often accused of being a ‘dreamer’ by his fellow planning associates and opponents who thought his ideas were too large to accomplish or too expensive. Yet many of Whitnall’s ideas prevailed, they just took time, though this did not bother him. One colleague said Whitnall would argue: “Time! What is Time!?”⁴⁵⁰ Whitnall’s passion towards the Milwaukee area and his hatred for the direction he saw the city and county taking ultimately pushed him into planning.

It would be impossible to understand Whitnall without first understanding Milwaukee’s troubled industrial growth, both in terms poor working environments and in the corrupt political history of the mayor’s office. Milwaukee’s boom in industry led, like in many other cities of the time, to poor working wages, bad housing and a dirty city. While earlier political parties worked toward better conditions, none was as successful as the Social Democratic Party, led by Victor Berger. Established in 1898 the party’s success was helped by a large German population and a corrupt mayor. Whitnall’s early involvement in the party led to his election as the City Treasurer in 1910 and important connections that would help his planning career.

Whitnall himself had a number of influences on his career as a planner, but the most important was probably his childhood. Born only a decade after Milwaukee incorporated, he grew up on a twenty-acre knoll filled with flowers

⁴⁵⁰ E.A. Howard, *Recollections on Development of Milwaukee County Park System* (1969, unpublished manuscript), located in Milwaukee County Parks Department Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

and trees and right next to the Milwaukee River. His father, Frank Whitnall, was an early florist and Charles worked under him for a number of years. Whitnall's home, amid the trees and next to a river, is an obvious source for his later transportation plans and his parkways were designed to preserve natural waterways and to create green space around them for children and their parents to relax and play. Though Whitnall's career changed later on in life from floriculture to banking, this first connection proved a lasting force.

Whitnall's planning career ultimately spanned almost forty years. He sat on the first unofficial planning board of the Milwaukee, the Metropolitan Park Commission and later the Board of Public Land Commissioners. After the election of his ally, Daniel Hoan, Whitnall and the BPLC were able to complete several projects that Whitnall had advocated including a municipal housing project, Garden Homes, zoning, and a Civic Center. Also on the Milwaukee County Parks Commission from the beginning, Whitnall firmly believed in decentralized and developed countywide zoning and a parkway system that is still in use today.

There are many limitations to this study. Much of Whitnall's movements through the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s remain unknown. That would require an extensive hunt through several different Milwaukee newspapers, including the *Milwaukee Journal*, the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, and the *Milwaukee Leader*. While online databases have helped, more can be done to research further into his actions. He traveled extensively around the country to visit friends and attend conferences. He also must have

corresponded with a number of important planners around the United States at this time. More time needs to be spent on finding these letters or papers. More should be researched in the Civic Center project and the Parkway project. Large gaps of time are missing where there was work being done.

Another aspect that should be explored is the entire Whitnall family. . Annie Gordon Whitnall and George Gordon Whitnall were both successful in their own right. Around the time of her separation from Whitnall, Annie seems to have become interested in education and politics. She ran for the Milwaukee School Board – and won – and also joined the Socialist Party. After her divorce from Charles and move to Los Angeles, it appears that she remained interested in education and continued to act on a national stage. Little research has been done on her. George Gordon Whitnall appears to have been much influenced by his father's methods and beliefs in planning and seems to have used them to shape Los Angeles. It appears that no large scale study of his work or his life in L.A has been undertaken. It would be interesting to compare father and son and see how Charles Whitnall measures up on a national stage. This connection between the two cities should possibly be studied further.

What kind of legacy did Whitnall leave? His belief in decentralization was right. After World War II, the people flocked to the suburbs. Now, in the twenty-first century many planners advocate for a return to living in the city. How does one preserve Whitnall's legacy of suburb parks and parkways while also pushing for more centralized living? Also a problem, while Milwaukee's

parks are often praised nationally, they have been hit by the economic recession like in other cities. Some have suggested selling off or privatizing the maintenance of the parks. Whitnall would have hated this idea. And Whitnall's housing project, Garden Homes, is constantly threatened by demolition. One home has already been bulldozed, preventing its nomination as a National Historic Landmark. The development is an important chapter in Whitnall's life and Milwaukee's history, how does one preserve historic low-income housing without wrecking its distinguishing characteristics?

APPENDIX

Poem by Eben E. Rexford, about Jerome Cary's ashes that were buried on the Whitnall Knoll

Often and often they talked together,
In the sweet Spring days or the sad Fall weather,
Of the life that is and the life to be,
Awed and perplexed by its mystery

Here for a day, and to-morrow, where?
When the grass grows over us, lying there
In still white city where dead men dwell,
What shall we dream of? Who can tell?

Can the dead come back? Do the living feel
Though the dear old places softly steal
The presence of those who have gone away
From the World we live in? Who shall say?

"I believe," one day the dreamer said,
"That in time to come, when men call me dead,
I shall live again in the flower that grows
Over my grave, My friend, who knows?"

"When I am dead I would have you make
My grave near by for old friendship's sake,
It would seem less lonely if you were near,
Though dead, I would feel you, would know and hear!"

Plant in the mould that is heaped above
He who forgets not, the rose I love,
And into my heart its roots will grow,
And feed on the dust of the dead below.

"So I shall become a part of the rose
Growing out of my grave, and each flower that blows,
Shall be a message of love I send
From that grave to each old and steadfast friend."
* * * *

He died and his ashes are hidden away
Under the roots of a rose to-day
And into those ashes the rose will grow
And feed on such food as few roses know.

The heart of the dead to the flower will give
Its sweetness and beauty, and those who live
And are true to the friendship of old will know
That the dead remembers! – And love will stir
Their loyal hearts for the friend below,
Who makes the rose his interpreter.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵¹ American Florist Company, *The American Florist: A Weekly Journal for the Trade*, Volume 9 Number 315, 14 June 1894.

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